

SN CONVERSATION: WHEN OZZIE GUILLEN STARTS TALKING ... HE JUST CAN'T STOP

SEE A DIFFERENT GAME

SportingNews

MAGAZINE

Blue skies, blue chips

How USC's combination
of atmosphere and
attitude has created the
most talented team ever

USC all-everything
LB Rey Mavaluga
and DT Fili Moala

PLUS

NFL

- Tom Coughlin lightens up
- Aikman & Elway go deep

NBA

- My Turn: Greg Oden

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

- Who can save the Hoosiers?

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

- Ranking the QBs

NASCAR

- The Chase starts ... now

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Week of September 15, 2008



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ON THE COVER

18 You can't compete with USC

To understand how Pete Carroll's Trojans have dominated college football, look no further than the attitude he has instilled in his team: "Some guys," says linebacker Rey Mauluga, "don't like to compete. Other guys live for it. Which side are you on?" — *By Matt Hayes*
Cover Photography By Jay Drowns / SN

SEE A DIFFERENT GAME

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Quarterback Andrew Hatch's move from Harvard junior varsity to LSU starter is unique—but not so unique he didn't think it could happen: "I always hoped that I'd end up in a situation like this." — *By Dave Curtis*

32 An open door

With critics calling for his job before last season, Giants coach Tom Coughlin had no choice but to change: "I figured if this is going to be my last year, I may as well enjoy it." — *By Mike Vaccaro*

48 SN Conversation: Ozzie Guillen

The White Sox manager is a man who likes his boss: "You say something about Jerry Reinsdorf around me, be ready to fight ... because I will kick your (expletive) (expletive) if you talk about that man when you don't know him." — *By Steve Greenberg*

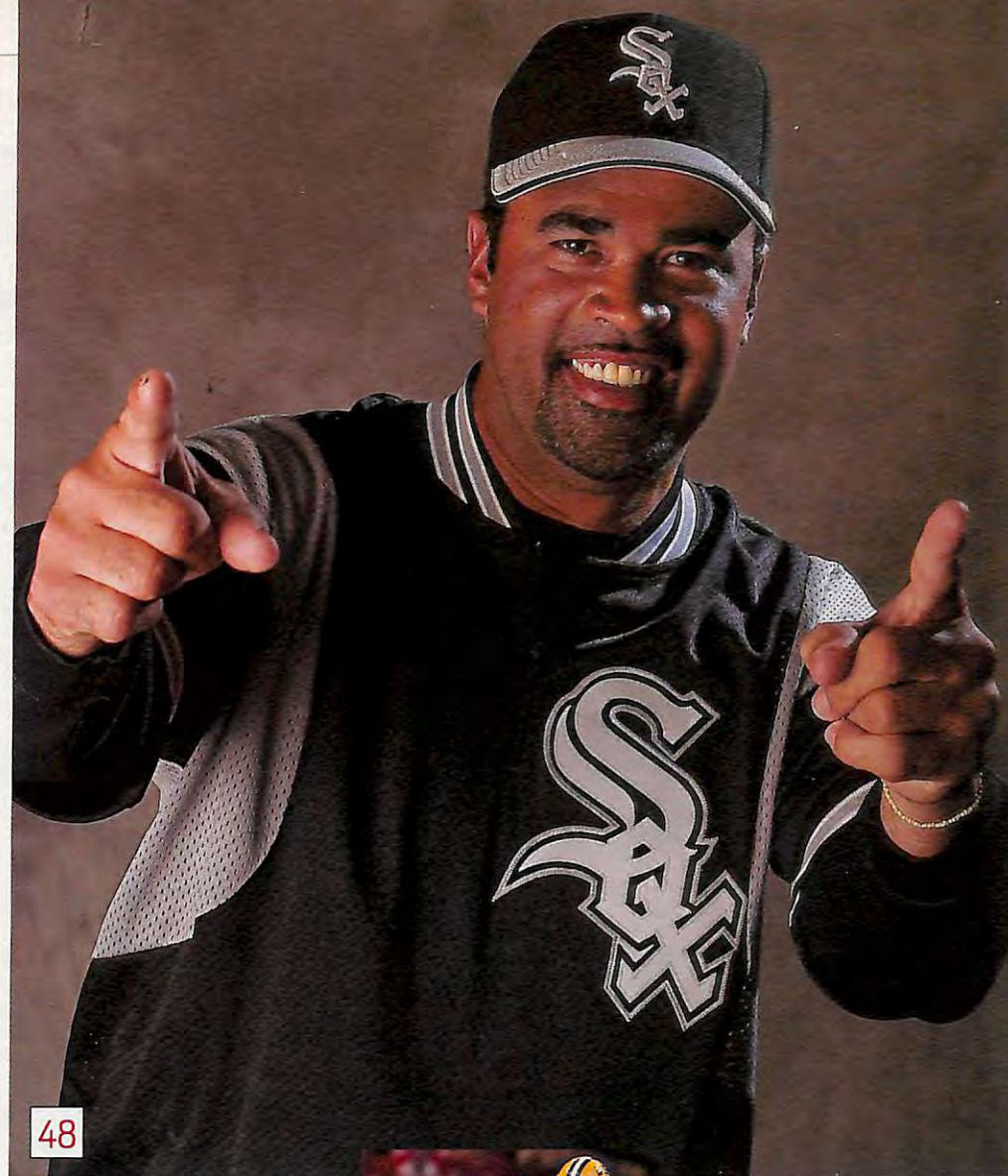
56 Stripes, but no stars

New basketball coach Tom Crean is owning—not renting—the rebuilding job at Indiana University, says Michigan State's Tom Izzo: "He'll wrinkle some ironed shirts, but he'll get a lot of people on his bandwagon." — *By Mike DeCourcy*

PHOTOS

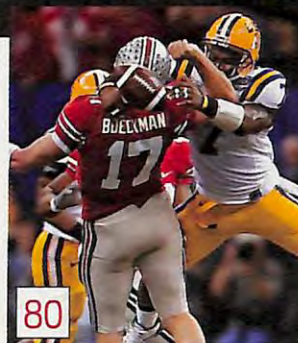
42 When man becomes fan

There are fans. Then there are superfans like 100 Percent Cheese Free: "The only tattoos that aren't Vikings or Vikings colors on my body are the logos of the teams that I caught Randy Moss against on his jumps into the stands—sort of like kills for a fighter pilot."



THE ROTATION

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80 Sure, LSU beat Ohio State last January, but the Tigers are defending national champions in theory only.

SPECIAL GUESTS

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- Out with the BCS: "The essence of sports is competition. The essence of the BCS is politics and greed."

MULTIMEDIA

SportingNews MAGAZINE

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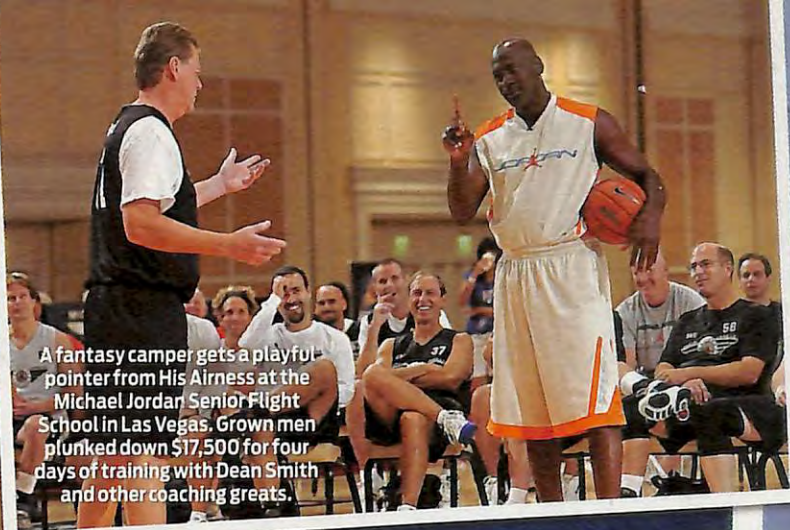
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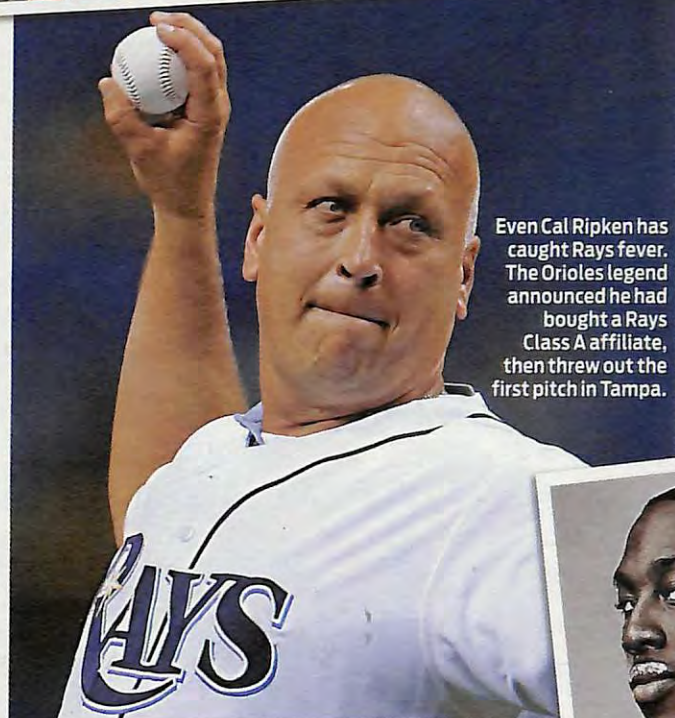
In Pictures



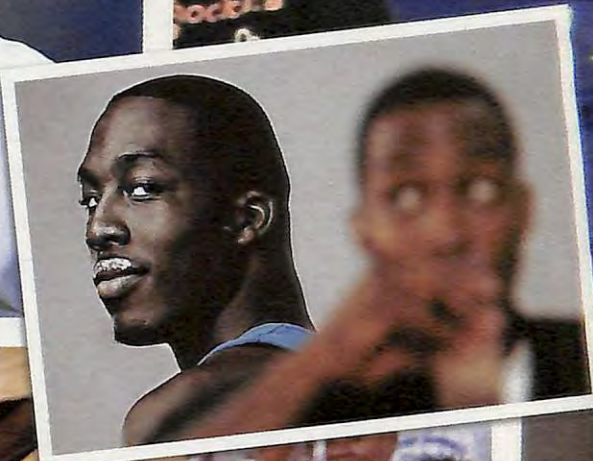
It was Take a 300-Game Winner to School Day at suburban Atlanta's Dolvin Elementary: Braves pitcher Tom Glavine surprised No. 1 fan Luke Vollkommer by picking him up in a limo, then joining him at school.



A fantasy camper gets a playful pointer from His Airness at the Michael Jordan Senior Flight School in Las Vegas. Grown men plunked down \$17,500 for four days of training with Dean Smith and other coaching greats.



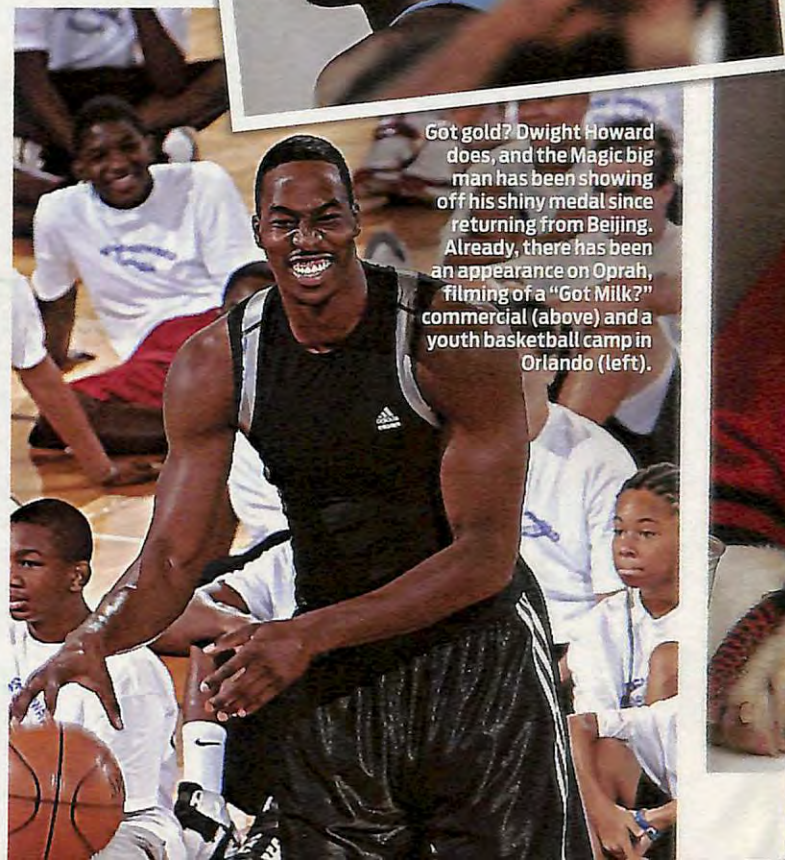
Even Cal Ripken has caught Rays fever. The Orioles legend announced he had bought a Rays Class A affiliate, then threw out the first pitch in Tampa.

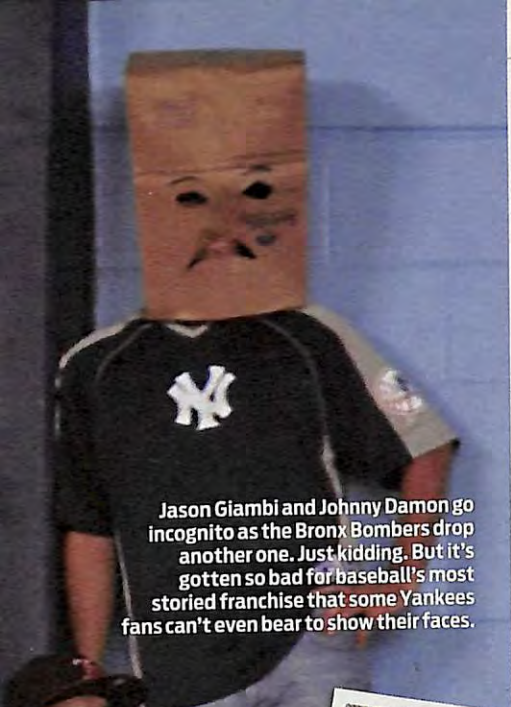


Got gold? Dwight Howard does, and the Magic big man has been showing off his shiny medal since returning from Beijing. Already, there has been an appearance on Oprah, filming of a "Got Milk?" commercial (above) and a youth basketball camp in Orlando (left).



He shoots, he scores ... he gives guided tours. That's NCAA tourney hero and big man on campus Stephen Curry (right) helping freshmen move into their dorms at Davidson.

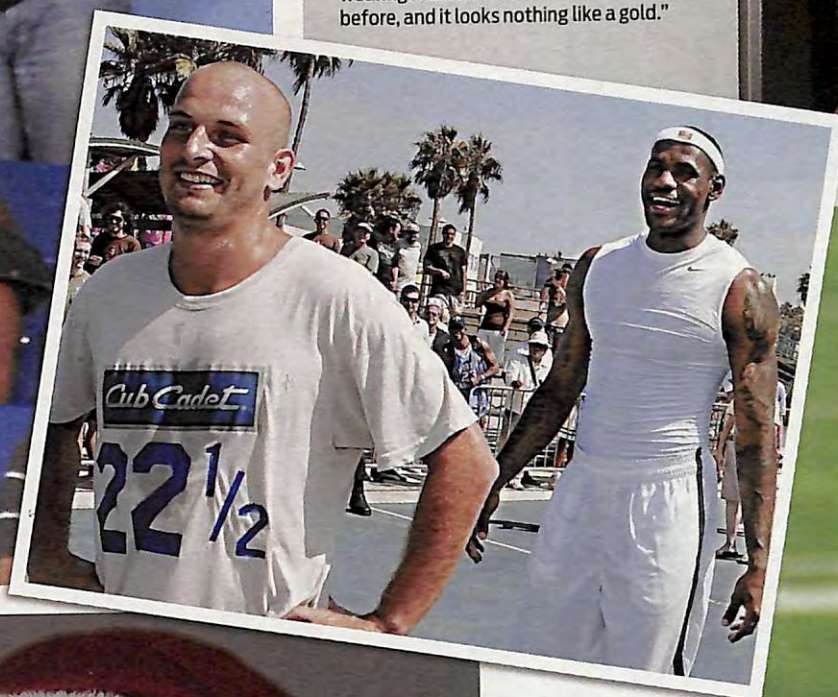




Jason Giambi and Johnny Damon go incognito as the Bronx Bombers drop another one. Just kidding. But it's gotten so bad for baseball's most storied franchise that some Yankees fans can't even bear to show their faces.



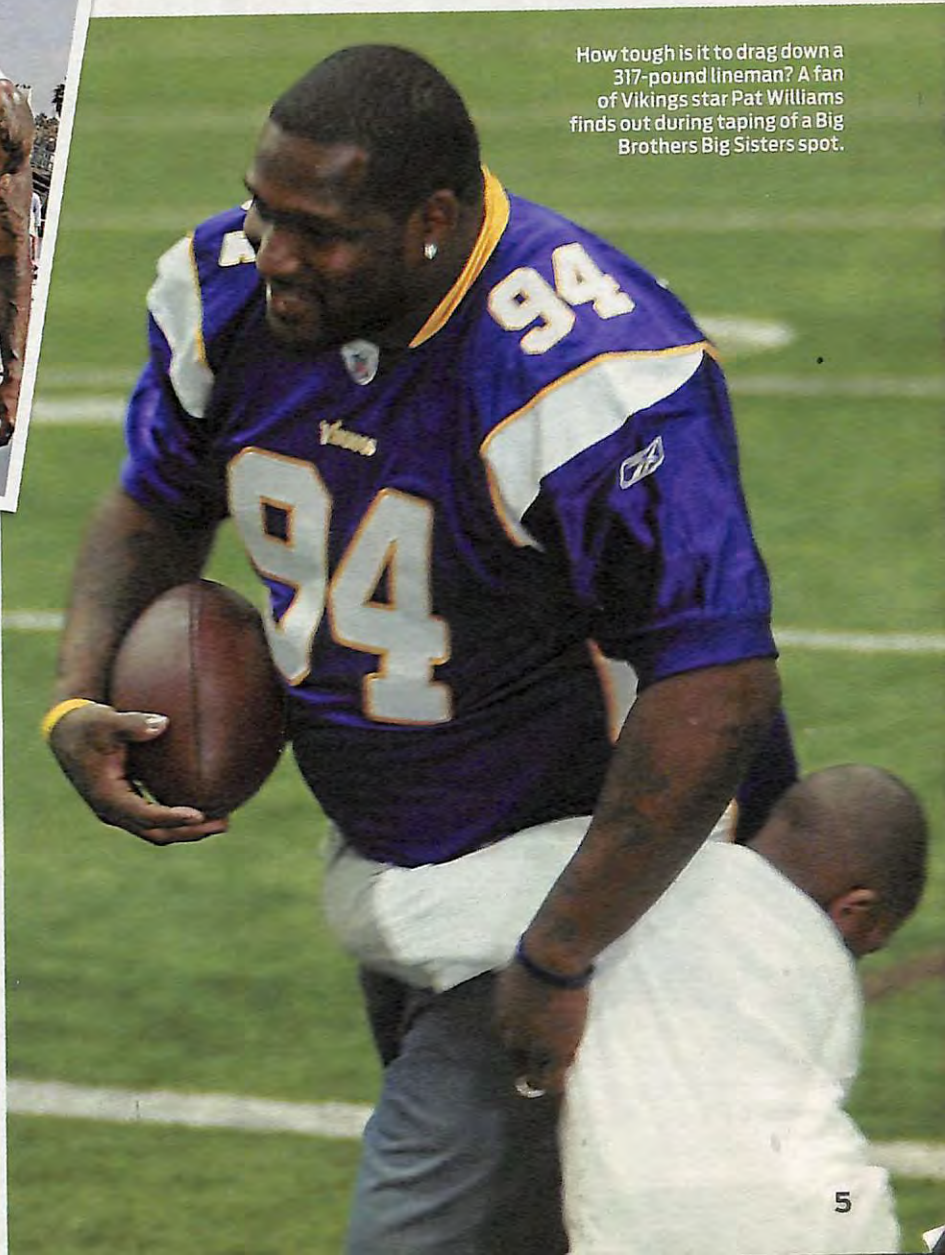
More fans turned out to welcome home Olympic hero Dwyane Wade than usually do for a Marlins game. Says the gold medal-wearing Miami Heat star: "I've seen a bronze before, and it looks nothing like a gold."



(Above): No word on whether the Cleveland Cavaliers will sign trick shot-making warehouse manager David Kalb, who beat LeBron James in a game of H-O-R-S-E after winning an online contest. "That wind," a stunned LeBron said after the loss.



(Left): The most beloved Bulldog between Georgia's hedges isn't Knowshon Moreno or Herschel Walker. It's portly pooch Uga VII, who checked in at 56½ pounds and was greeted by a chorus of woofs in his coronation game, a Georgia win over Georgia Southern.



How tough is it to drag down a 317-pound lineman? A fan of Vikings star Pat Williams finds out during taping of a Big Brothers Big Sisters spot.

Since you asked ...

You have questions, we have answers

Write us

It's like *Jeopardy!* All letters to the editor must be phrased in the form of a question, even if it's "Can you believe *Sporting News* picked Georgia to win it all?" We'll choose our favorites and answer them in this space and in *Sporting News Today*. E-mail your questions to yourturn@sportingnews.com, along with your name and hometown.

YOUR QUESTION:

Does Matt Leinart have all of the tools it takes to be a productive QB in the NFL? I thought for sure this would be the year he'd be leading my Cardinals. I'm starting to wonder if he ever will.

— James Thomas, Phoenix

YOUR QUESTION:

Will Toronto ever have an NFL team?

— Chris Mallory, Marietta, S.C.

YOUR QUESTION:

As a Rockets fan, I'm a little worried about the start Yao Ming and Ron Artest got off to. Will they be able to get along? If they do, this could be Houston's year.

— Stu Simpson, Fort Worth, Texas

YOUR QUESTION:

As a father of two young boys who'd love to retire early, I'd be interested in knowing what Archie Manning did to groom two great quarterbacks. Is it all genetics, or was there some special routine he put them through?

— Tony Taylor-Kent, Wichita, Kan.

YOUR QUESTION:

As a Braves fan, I wish Tom Glavine all the best in his recovery. We could sure use him back in 2009. What are the chances he'll be back, and what are the factors that will go into his decision?

— Tim Roberts, Alpharetta, Ga.

THEIR ANSWER:

Dennis Green

Former Cardinals coach

James,

I still feel that Matt has all the tools to be a terrific starting QB in the NFL. The games he missed because of injuries the last two years have made it more difficult for him. In having two quality QBs, the Cardinals have what most NFL teams are missing. Matt will get his chance again and will make the best of it because he has the will to be on top.

THEIR ANSWER:

Paul Godfrey

Blue Jays CEO

Chris,

Toronto will get an NFL team. It is not a question of *if*; it is only a timing question of *when*. The NBA, NHL and Major League Baseball all recognize the significant sports interest in Toronto by having a strong franchise in this great city. The NFL will go international, and Toronto will be the first global team in that great league.

THEIR ANSWER:

Ron Artest

New Rockets forward

Stu,

I can't wait to get started playing with the Houston Rockets. This team is like a dream team. There never were any problems between Yao and me. That was something that was twisted by the media.

THEIR ANSWER:

Archie Manning

Father of Peyton and Eli

Tony,

I did not groom my sons to be quarterbacks. As youngsters, they participated in all sports. They didn't start playing football until the seventh grade. As high school quarterbacks, they worked extremely hard and were fortunate enough to receive interest from colleges. I'd be very careful as a parent trying to groom your boys to be pro athletes.

THEIR ANSWER:

Tom Glavine

300-game winner

Tim,

I appreciate your well wishes. I think the biggest factors as far as me playing next year are going to be how I heal and whether the Braves want me back. I won't know the answers to those questions for a couple of months.

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Blog on

Florida baseball isn't working

Posted by: [imzhamez](#)

Florida and major league baseball just don't mix. The Marlins haven't even been around that long, yet they've won two World Series—and still have had to dismantle the team each time. The revenue is just not there.

I can't imagine the Tampa Bay Rays being much different if they win it all this year. Players will command larger salaries, and the team will not be able to afford it. This year, Tampa Bay is about to oust the Yankees from postseason

play, which has not been done in more than a decade. Yes, Tampa Bay is responsible for this. The Rays have even put Red Sox Nation's hopes of reaching the second season at risk. And still, with just about a month to go, there are many, many empty seats in both Florida stadiums each and every home game. It's pretty pathetic.

If MLB can't find a way to reverse this trend, then maybe the league should contract, or relocate these teams. There have to be other places where the fans will actually support the teams.

To see more of [imzhamez's blog](#), and many others, read the community blogs at sportingnews.com.

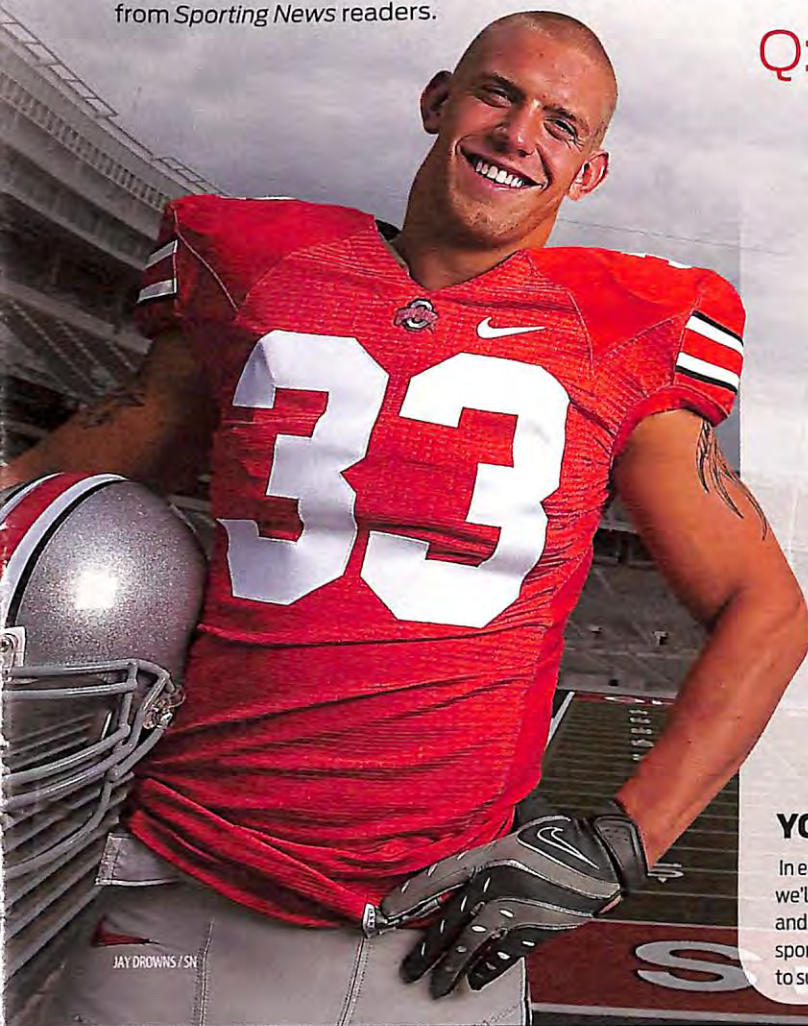


This is how baseball looks in Florida. The Marlins have proved they can win—but fewer than 600 fans showed up to watch them beat the Braves in September. Chances are things won't turn out much different for the Rays.

STADIUM: WILFRED LEE / AP

5 QUESTIONS ... for James Laurinaitis

His dad roughed up guys named Ax, Smash and Crush as one-half of wrestling's rough-and-tumble Legion of Doom tag team. Maybe that's where Ohio State All-American linebacker James Laurinaitis gets his mean streak. This fall, the hard-hitting senior will try to become college football's first back-to-back Butkus Award winner since Brian Bosworth in 1985-86. The all-everything Buckeye took a break from practice to take questions from *Sporting News* readers.



Q: *It seems more and more teams are spreading the field and using mobile quarterbacks to attack your defense. What do you feel you learned, and what adjustments are needed this year from the Illinois game last year in how to defend the spread attack?*

Noah Brader, Dublin, Ohio

Laurinaitis: A lot more teams are doing it. Obviously, Illinois did it effectively here last year. I think the defense has to be held accountable. It's a hard offense to stop because you have to account for the quarterback. For us, we've done a good job of looking at different ways to attack it. You all have to keep your assignments and account for everyone. It all comes down, especially in a spread attack, to executing your job.

YOUR TURN

In each issue of the new *Sporting News*, we'll give readers the reporter's notebook and have them ask questions of a big-name sports personality. Go to sportingnews.com to submit a question.

Q: *Do you get more pumped playing in front of the home crowd or playing in a hostile environment?*

Randy McFarland, Woodstock, Va.

Laurinaitis: There is nothing like playing at Ohio Stadium. *Nothing.* It's incredible to experience that. I still get goosebumps. To go to places like Penn State, and I played at Texas, and see all the anti-Buckeye signs, that gets you riled up. But the most special thing is to go on the road, go into places like Texas and see the sea of red—Ohio State fans who travel anywhere to be part of the atmosphere and support us. That's what really gets you going.

Q: *You remind me of a player many years ago whose name was Randy Gradishar. Both of you were and are hard-nosed and hard workers. What one thing can you attribute to your success as a linebacker at Ohio State?*

Doug Kuszmaul, Las Vegas

Laurinaitis: First off, comparing me to Mr. Gradishar is unbelievable. I've met him, and he's such a smart guy and he loves this university so much. As far as my work ethic, that's the thing I can attribute to the success. When I was a freshman, it was guys like A.J. Hawk, Bobby Carpenter, Anthony Schlegel, and I was learning it from those three. They taught me a lot.

Q: *What running back do you think will give your team its biggest challenge this year?*

Mike Sawyer, East Lansing, Mich.

Laurinaitis: There are a lot of great running backs in the Big Ten. Javon Ringer (Michigan State), P.J. Hill (Wisconsin) ... the Big Ten is known for having big running backs. The great thing is that we face Beanie Wells in practice. You hear the Heisman hype with him, and he deserves all of that. He's extremely strong and fast. I don't know if I can pick out one that is the biggest challenge in the Big Ten. But facing Chris Wells has prepared us for any challenge.

Q: *I am a 1994 alum, and for the first time in 14 years I got closed out of a football ticket this year. Do you have extra tickets for any game or can you talk to Archie Griffin for me?*

Brad Cygnor, St. Paul, Minn.

Laurinaitis: (Laughs) I've got a pretty short leash myself on tickets, and I don't know what to tell you about Archie. I'm sure you can find a way to get into the game. But I guess I'll say this: Hopefully the games look good on HD.

—Compiled by Derek Samson and Ken Bradley



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Survey Says ...

SN's panel

Steve Bartkowski
Falcons' all-time passing leader

Lynn Dickey
Packers-record 4,458 yards in '83

Jim Everett
Greatest hit: KO'ing Jim Rome

Roman Gabriel
Rams' career passing TDs leader

Rich Gannon
4 straight Pro Bowls: 1999-2002

Ron Jaworski
"Polish Rifle" talks a good game

Joe Kapp
Led Vikings to 1st playoff berth

Erik Kramer
Got start as replacement player

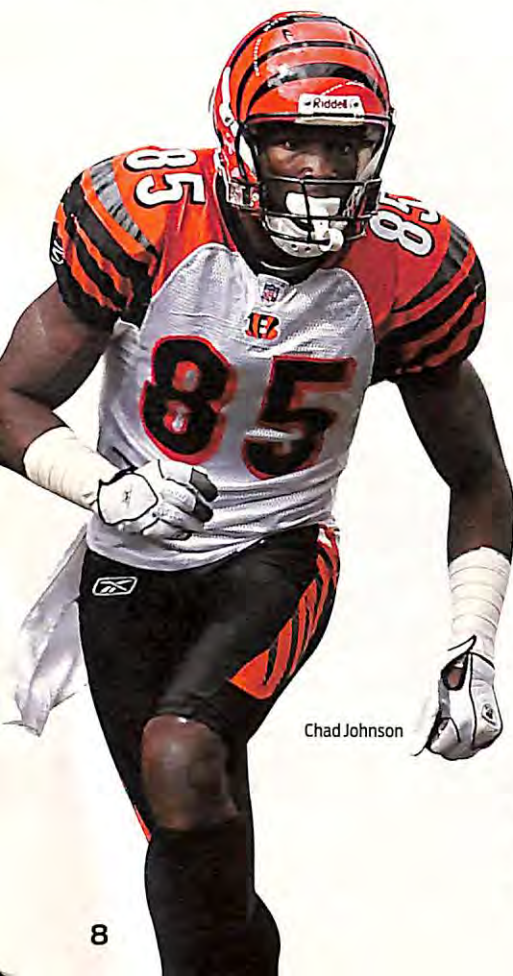
Don Majkowski
Got Wally Pipp'd in '92 by Favre

Jim Miller
34 completions in one game in '99

Warren Moon
In Canton, Canadian halls of fame

Dan Pastorini
Now races cars for a living

Joe Theismann
2-time Pro Bowler, '83 NFL MVP



Chad Johnson

Has Tom Brady won his last ring? Is Chad Johnson worth the trouble?

Sporting News surveyed a baker's dozen of former NFL quarterbacks—who have a collective 1,848 TD passes and 26 Pro Bowl selections—for answers to those questions and more

The current receiver I would have loved to throw to is ...

➤ Randy Moss, Patriots	4 1/3
➤ Marvin Harrison, Colts	4
➤ Wes Welker, Patriots	2

Also receiving votes: Larry Fitzgerald, Cardinals; Andre Johnson, Texans; Chad Johnson, Bengals.

He said it

"Randy Moss. Duh." — **Jim Everett**

"Daunte Culpepper ... Randall Cunningham ...



Tom Brady ... (three amazing seasons) playing with Randy Moss."

— **Warren Moon**

"No one playing today could touch James Lofton."

— **Lynn Dickey**

The current defender I'm relieved I don't have to face is ...

➤ Shawne Merriman, Chargers	3 1/2
➤ Dwight Freeney, Colts	2

Also receiving votes: Champ Bailey, Broncos; Antonio Cromartie, Chargers; Albert Haynesworth, Titans; Ray Lewis, Ravens; Jason Taylor, Redskins; Brian Urlacher, Bears.

He said it

"Shawne Merriman has the potential to be the game's most dominant player. He's a Lawrence Taylor-type game-changer." — **Erik Kramer**

"Albert Haynesworth is a mountain man. I do not like anyone 6-6, 350 landing on me. I'm fragile." — **Jim Miller**

"There's never been one." — **Dan Pastorini**

Quarterbacks today are better at ___ than they were in my day.

➤ Making money	4
➤ Nothing	3
➤ Improvising	2

Also receiving votes: Managing their commercial schedules; piling up passing yards; processing information; running.

He said it

"Cashing checks." — **Joe Theismann**

By the time it's all said and done, Tom Brady will have how many rings?

➤ Four	6
➤ Five	3
➤ Three	3
➤ Nine	1

He said it

"The Patriots' run will be over soon. The league is catching up with them." — **Warren Moon**

"No more than he has now—unless, of course, he finally gets married." — **Steve Bartkowski**

What's more entertaining—pro or college football?

➤ Pro	11
➤ College	2

He said it

"The ability to throw the ball in the NFL is much more advanced and polished." — **Don Majkowski**

"Pro is great, but college gets my vote here. Pros are grown men, and college is played by young men. More probability for error in college, which produces more weekly upsets.

Love the tradition, as well." — **Jim Everett**

"In pro football, even bad teams have an outside chance to beat good teams. In college, bad teams mostly have no chance." — **Lynn Dickey**



Jim Everett

Bengals receiver Chad Johnson is ...

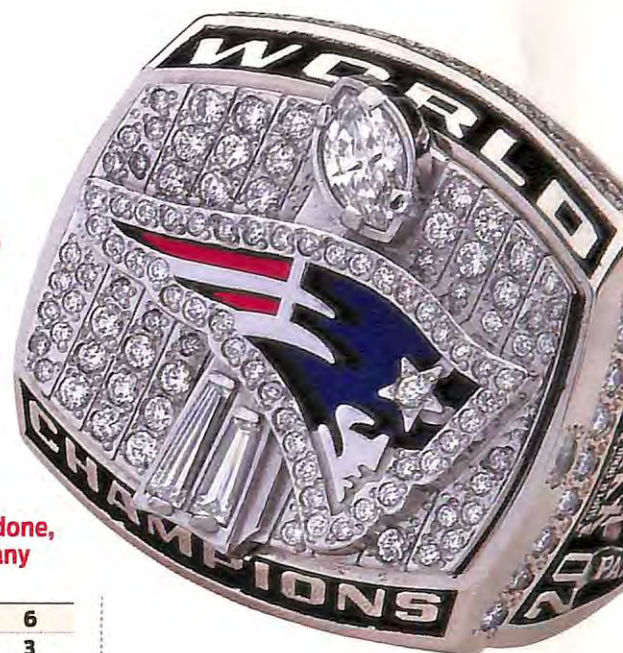
➤ Very talented	5
➤ A liability	2
➤ Attention-starved	1 1/2

Also receiving votes: Bipolar; frustrated; handcuffed; immature; a (rear end); selfish.

He said it

"A free spirit in a team game. I would suggest he huddle up with Captain Jim Marshall, the NFL free spirit of all time." — **Joe Kapp**

"He's a rare talent trapped in a horrible franchise. If the shoes were reversed, Jerry Rice wouldn't have stood silent, either." — **Erik Kramer**



Who's the current coach—head or assistant—you'd most enjoy playing for?

➤ Bill Belichick, Patriots	4
➤ Mike Holmgren, Seahawks	3
➤ Tom Moore, Colts (off. coordinator)	1 1/2

Also receiving votes: Tony Dungy, Colts; Mike Martz, 49ers (off. coordinator); Mike Shanahan, Broncos; Mike Smith, Falcons; Norv Turner, Chargers.

He said it

"Bill Belichick reminds me of George Allen."

— **Roman Gabriel**

"Dungy defensively and Holmgren offensively are the most diligent and intelligent coaches ever to teach in the NFL." — **Jim Everett**

"Tom Moore lets you play." — **Ron Jaworski**

Don't be surprised if ___ wins the Super Bowl this season.

➤ Jacksonville	4
➤ Green Bay	3
➤ New Orleans	2
➤ San Diego	2
➤ New England	1
➤ New York Giants	1

He said it

"The Jaguars play physical defense, can run the ball with two good backs and have a QB that makes very few mistakes."

— **Warren Moon**

"San Diego has as much talent as anyone. The question will be if Philip Rivers has matured enough." — **Erik Kramer**

— *Compiled by Jeff D'Alessio, Steve Greenberg and Derek Samson*

Countdown to ... SN's BASEBALL AWARDS

Coming in the October 27 edition of *Sporting News*

Player of the year By Ryan Fagan



A.L. The case for Twins 1B **Justin Morneau**

He's a dark horse, but Morneau has teamed up with Joe Mauer to lead the Twins on yet another unexpected playoff push. Morneau is the power and RBI machine in a Twins lineup filled with slap and gap hitters. It hardly seems possible that a player who won this year's home run derby—and the MVP in 2006—can be underrated, but Morneau is becoming an expert at producing huge numbers under a veil of relative secrecy.



N.L. The case for Cardinals 1B **Albert Pujols**

Not much was expected of the Cardinals or Pujols this spring—St. Louis because of a perceived lack of talent, Pujols because of worries about his elbow. But Pujols is putting together another typical season (for him)—30-plus homers, scoring and driving in tons of runs, a batting average far north of .330 and another outstanding season in the field.

Pitcher of the year



A.L. The case for the Indians' **Cliff Lee** By "Sudden" Sam McDowell SN's 1970 A.L. pitcher of the year

He seems to have exceptional stuff and excellent control, something I never had. He also has a good idea as to how to pitch, something that is missed with most modern-day pitchers. There actually is a science to pitching. With pitchers being brought to the big leagues with only two, three, maybe four years of seasoning in the minors, there isn't enough time to teach it.



N.L. The case for the Diamondbacks' **Brandon Webb** By "Black Jack" McDowell SN's 1993 A.L. pitcher of the year

Each of the three big names—Webb, Tim Lincecum and CC Sabathia—could run the table in September and run away with the award. I'm leaning toward Webb. He could end up 15 games above .500 for a .500 team. Regardless of the weakness of the division, Webb's starts during a pennant race are far more important than those Lincecum has seen.

—Jeff D'Alessio

Rookie of the year

A.L. The case for Rays 3B **Evan Longoria** By Red Sox 2B Dustin Pedroia SN's 2007 winner

Shoot, he's a good choice. He's hit 20-plus home runs. He's driven in a lot of runs. He plays great defense. He made the All-Star team. He's had a great year. I think he is going to be a middle-of-the-order type hitter for a long time. He's young. He's very talented. He has a bright future.

—Bill Eichenberger

N.L. The case for Cubs C **Geovany Soto** By Brewers LF Ryan Braun SN's 2007 winner

As far as overall consistency, he's been unbelievable. You look at what that pitching staff's done, and you can't discount what he's done defensively. Offensively, he's swung the bat great, and I think they probably just look at that as a bonus on top of the way he's handled the pitching staff.

—Ryan Fagan

Comeback player of the year

By Ken "Hawk" Harrelson, SN's 1968 A.L. winner

A.L. The case for Indians LHP **Cliff Lee**

He's the comeback player and the Cy Young. If I could answer how he got so much better, I'd put it in written form and I'd make more money than I could spend. It's all between the ears—whether you think you can or you can't, you're right either way. Every time he goes out there, you know you've got your hands full.

N.L. The case for Cardinals OF **Ryan Ludwick**

Every time I see him is on a highlight film, so he's doing something good. These guys are paying their dues down in the minor leagues (Ludwick spent parts of nine seasons in the minors), trying to figure it out, and eventually they do. Up until last year, I never heard of the guy.

—Matt Crossman

3 UP

Three past *Sporting News* award winners and Hall of Famers play a little fantasy baseball with us:



Paul Molitor
SN's 1978 A.L.
Rookie of the year



Bobby Doerr
SN's 1944 A.L.
Player of the year



Tony Oliva
SN's 1964 A.L.
Rookie of the year

Pitcher I'm glad I don't have to face	Jake Peavy, Padres	Josh Beckett, Red Sox	Josh Beckett, Red Sox
Manager I'd like to play for	Joe Torre, Dodgers	Jim Leyland, Tigers	Joe Torre, Dodgers
One player I'd start my team with	Chase Utley, 2B, Phillies	Alex Rodriguez, 3B, Yankees	Alex Rodriguez, 3B, Yankees

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Brandon Webb

By "Black Jack" McDowell
SN's 1993 A.L. pitcher
of the year

Each of the three big names—Webb, Tim Lincecum and CC Sabathia—could run the table in September and run away with the award. I'm leaning toward Webb. He could end up 15 games above .500 for a .500 team. Regardless of the weakness of the division, Webb's starts during a pennant race are far more important than those Lincecum has seen.

—Jeff D'Alessio

Rookie of the year

A.L.

The case for Rays 3B

Evan Longoria

By Red Sox 2B Dustin Pedroia
SN's 2007 winner

Shoot, he's a good choice. He's hit 20-plus home runs. He's driven in a lot of runs. He plays great defense. He made the All-Star team. He's had a great year. I think he is going to be a middle-of-the-order type hitter for a long time. He's young. He's very talented. He has a bright future.

—Bill Eichenberger

N.L.

The case for Cubs C

Geovany Soto

By Brewers LF Ryan Braun
SN's 2007 winner

As far as overall consistency, he's been unbelievable. You look at what that pitching staff's done, and you can't discount what he's done defensively. Offensively, he's swung the bat great, and I think they probably just look at that as a bonus on top of the way he's handled the pitching staff.

—Ryan Fagan

Comeback player of the year

By Ken "Hawk" Harrelson, SN's 1968 A.L. winner

A.L.

The case for Indians LHP

Cliff Lee

He's the comeback player and the Cy Young. If I could answer how he got so much better, I'd put it in written form and I'd make more money than I could spend. It's all between the ears—whether you think you can or you can't, you're right either way. Every time he goes out there, you know you've got your hands full.

N.L.

The case for Cardinals OF

Ryan Ludwick

Every time I see him is on a highlight film, so he's doing something good. These guys are paying their dues down in the minor leagues (Ludwick spent parts of nine seasons in the minors), trying to figure it out, and eventually they do. Up until last year, I never heard of the guy.

—Matt Crossman

3 UP

Three past *Sporting News* award winners and Hall of Famers play a little fantasy baseball with us:



Paul Molitor
SN's 1978 A.L.
Rookie of the year



Bobby Doerr
SN's 1944 A.L.
Player of the year



Tony Oliva
SN's 1964 A.L.
Rookie of the year

Pitcher I'm glad I don't have to face	Jake Peavy, Padres	Josh Beckett, Red Sox	Josh Beckett, Red Sox
Manager I'd like to play for	Joe Torre, Dodgers	Jim Leyland, Tigers	Joe Torre, Dodgers
One player I'd start my team with	Chase Utley, 2B, Phillies	Alex Rodriguez, 3B, Yankees	Alex Rodriguez, 3B, Yankees

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SEE A DIFFERENT GAME

My turn



You want to know how the knee is, right? It's OK. Everyone does. It's something that, when you have surgery and then go through rehab, you just get used to. *How is the knee feeling?* I hear that question a thousand times a day. Maybe not a thousand, but it seems like it.

So let's put the answer out there: Good. Really good. Great, in fact.

I have been cleared to play. The doctors said I am 100 percent, which means that my rehab is officially behind me. But the funny thing about rehab and sitting out a whole year—and I'd bet that anyone else who has done this will say the same thing—it's never really behind you. I will take the experience with me forever.

Some of the ways rehab will stay with me are obvious. I certainly got to know our great training staff in Portland better. And I was introduced to things I never thought I would know. Pilates, for example, to strengthen my core and—as they say—"lengthen" me. I am seven feet. I did not think I needed lengthening. But Pilates is hard. I swear, I got myself into some positions that I did not think I was going to get out of.

Then there's the bike—a real mountain bike, not a stationary bike. At my size, you don't spend a lot of time on a bike. But after the season, I spent 10 days in Hawaii, riding 13½ miles a day. I could have done it in Portland, but can you imagine people walking around and here comes big ol' Greg Oden riding through town on a bike?

I'm back

And you have to look a lot deeper than my knee to see what I got out of rehab

By Greg Oden

Oden spent more time in the weight room and training room than he did on the court, but he won't say his first NBA season was wasted.

So we decided to do it in a safe place with no cars until I got used to it. Hawaii sounded like a good choice to me. Someone offers you a trip to Hawaii, you take it.

But there's more I'll take from rehab. I had microfracture surgery, and I will never forget the guys who had the same surgery and contacted me to give encouragement—Jason Kidd, Amare Stoudemire, Kenyon Martin, Darius Miles. I won't forget my teammates, either. All through this process, I never felt like I wasn't part of the team. That was important.

I think my relationship with fans in Portland is even better now. I will never forget our opening home game. I wasn't able to play, but I did get to introduce the team. It was the first time I walked without my crutches. I stood up, threw the crutches down and everyone was cheering like crazy. Little did they know that I was so nervous. I just didn't want to trip. I have big feet, so I worry about that. But hearing them cheer, I felt better with every step.

Now, I am hoping to make them cheer again but in uniform this time. Rehab will always be with me, and I am grateful for that. But if no one asks me again how my knee is doing, that'd be fine with me.

— As told to Sean Deveney

Portland Trail Blazers center Greg Oden, the No. 1 overall pick in the 2007 NBA draft, is a regular contributor to *Sporting News*.

The rest of the All-Injury team

Greg Oden calls rehab "the hardest thing I've ever had to do in my life." He's not the only NBA player who has had to go through it lately, though. Four other key players have recently toiled to mend faulty joints and broken bones:

Dwyane Wade, Heat. His performance in the Olympics probably made Heat fans feel better about his left knee.

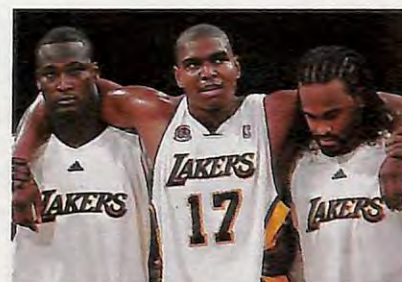
Yao Ming, Rockets. He was not 100 percent in the Olympics, but his surgically repaired left foot held up well.

Andrew Bynum, Lakers. His dislocated left kneecap has been

located. His agent says Bynum is 100 percent.

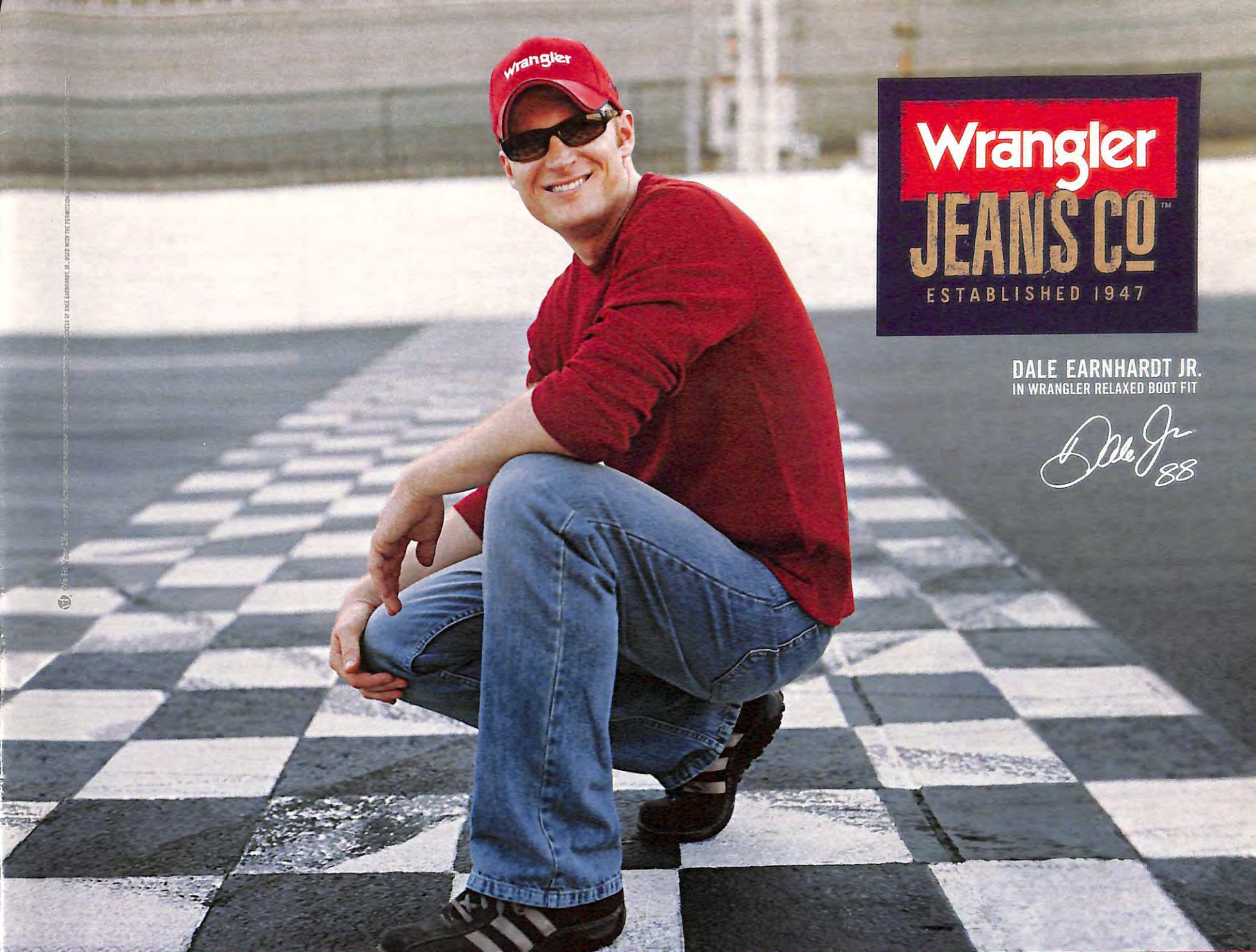
Gilbert Arenas, Wizards. Arenas hasn't done too well in rehabs, twice pushing himself to come back too soon after knee surgery. Thus, this time his focus has been on downtime.

— Sean Deveney



During the playoffs, we heard a lot about how good the Lakers would be with a healthy Bynum (center) in the lane. Now that he's back on his feet, we're about to find out.

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Will's world

The loneliest college football fan

There are 8 million stories in the Naked City, and none them will be on *GameDay*



Will Leitch is the author of three books, including *God Save The Fan*. He is the founding editor of *Deadspin* and a contributing editor at *New York magazine*.

As someone who grew up in Mattoon, Ill., where the closest professional sports team was more than 120 miles away, I'm consistently overwhelmed by the abundance of sports options we have in New York City, where I've lived for eight years. Counting minor league teams, we are, at any given moment, a train ride from 11 pro sports teams (Mets, Yankees, Brooklyn Cyclones, Staten Island Yankees, Nets, Knicks, Jets, Giants, Devils, Islanders and Rangers, and I suspect I've missed a couple, not accounting for soccer and Arena Football). Madison Square Garden hosts college basketball all winter, and if that's not enough, when St. John's, one of the historic college hoops schools, isn't playing there, it's just a hop on the train to Jamaica away. The U.S. Open may not have as varied a breakfast selection as Wimbledon, but, man, it's a lot more fun. Heck, we even host the NASCAR awards.

But we are sorely lacking in perhaps America's most populist sport, the one that draws fevered fans in areas as diverse as Athens, Ga., Beaverton, Ore., and Columbia, Mo. With the possible exception of the sad denizens of Alaska and Maine, we New Yorkers live in the worst place in the country for college football. The closest Division I-A (or whatever the hell they're calling it now) football school to Manhattan

is Rutgers, which, despite a recent resurgence, is not going to be confused with USC. (The Scarlet Knights do, however, boast Tony Soprano as a fan. So there's that.) Most of our schools pour their resources into basketball; St. John's has a good football team, but it plays in Division III, sharing the field with schools from River Falls, Wis., Marshall, Texas, and Arden Hills, Minn. Oh, wait. That's St. John's, Minn.; our St. John's hasn't had a team since 2002.

We have two teams that actually play in the city. Fordham plays in the Bronx, in a "stadium" that holds 7,000; the gym where you had your prom probably holds as many. And Columbia actually finds space to play in Manhattan, at Baker Field in Inwood, the northernmost tip of the island. New York has become a considerably safer city over the last few years, but, you know, I still wouldn't recommend tailgating.

Real estate, of course, is the main reason we're not a college football town; if we can't find a corner to put either of our pro football teams, we're not exactly going to knock down public housing for a Columbia-Case Western game. It's easy to construct a 92,000-seat stadium in Tuscaloosa; it's not lacking for available open space.

The college football season has been going for a few weeks, and I keep looking around, hoping someone here will notice. Sure, I can always pop by a sports bar and watch my Illini with fellow alumni, but that's no fun; I want water cooler talk, not to sit in a chat room with people wearing orange still vainly defending Chief Illiniwek. The largest city in the country, full of raving lunatic sports fans, and I can't find a single person who can pick Matthew Stafford out of a lineup.

Maybe if I'm ever in SN's offices, I'll ask Hank Steinbrenner about this. (I suspect we'll meet on a smoke break.) Someone in that family's gotta have enough money to buy Ohio State and ship the Buckeyes to Brooklyn, right? Lord knows they're for sale.

Bold, daring predictions

1. Brett Favre will throw an interception to lose a game for the Jets, and a broadcaster will congratulate him, pointing out, "He's just trying to win a football game." Well, yes, yes, he is. How kind of him.

2. Twenty thousand fans will stand in line outside Yankee Stadium, waiting for playoff tickets to go on sale. Meanwhile, good seats still available in Tampa.



Warner seems pretty unlikely to get caught in a compromising position, so the Cardinals probably have nothing to worry about.

3. My Arizona Cardinals will be above .500 at the midway point, until Kurt Warner is photographed with college coeds. We lose our next eight. You e-mail me at will@deadspin.com to try to make me feel better. You fail.

People of the Fortnite

Dave Wannstedt. Imagine that about 15 years ago, you worked as an assistant to someone who changed the foundation of your company, hoisting it from a mom and pop into a global powerhouse. Based on your proximity to genius, another company hired you away, but, as CEO, you ran that company into the ground. Your old boss, who left the old company to run Nike, or China, whatever,

brought you back into the fold, and when he retired, you were, logically, named CEO. Unfortunately (perhaps because of your mustache), you ran *that* company into bankruptcy and were ultimately fired. Defeated, you took a job with a hometown firm just happy to bring you in for P.R. purposes. This job is much easier ... and still you screw it up. Over the last 15 years, you have devastated three companies ... but this time, they just won't fire you. Even if you lose to Bowling Green. Life's a lot easier if you work in sports.

Sarah Palin. Whatever your political persuasion, it's pretty impossible to deny the appeal of a smart, politically savvy, attractive woman who isn't afraid to shoot a moose in the face. Stupid moose. If you haven't seen the video of our possible vice president's mid-80s cameo as a local TV broadcaster in Alaska, I beg you to do so; a simple web search should suffice. I do miss the days when sportscasters used Aqua Net. Somebody get some of that stuff to Skip Bayless, stat.



BUSS ABOVE: MICHAEL TRAN / FILM MAGIC;
BUSS ABOVE RIGHT: ANIMAL FAIR MEDIA / GETTY IMAGES

My profile

(What you won't find on Facebook ... even if you are approved as a friend)

Jeanie Buss

Los Angeles Lakers vice president



Born: September 26, 1964, in Santa Monica, Calif.

Status: Dating Lakers coach Phil Jackson

Alma mater: USC

What's on TV: *American Idol*; *Dog Whisperer* (my dog, Princess Cujo Buss, was featured on an episode!); *Dancing With The Stars*; *Big Brother*

In my iPod: Red Hot Chili Peppers, Smash Mouth, Daughtry, Beyonce, Mariah Carey, Maroon 5, Rufus Wainwright

Favorite flicks: *The Blues Brothers*, *Best in Show*, any musical

What I'm reading: More business and industry journals than the stack of books Phil has given me that just keeps growing. Last book he gave me was *Eat, Pray, Love* by Elizabeth Gilbert. Someday, I will have time to read it!

Magazine subscriptions: *People*, *Time*, *Entertainment Weekly*, *The New Yorker*

Bookmarks: nytimes.com, latimes.com, realgm.com, msn.com, yahoo.com

Superstitions: Don't have any, but I do practice rituals that will relax me before a game or big presentation, such as lighting candles or wearing one of my eight Lakers championship rings.

Worst habit: Worrying too much

Love to trade places for a day with ... Dorothy Hamill—the day she won the gold medal for figure

skating at the 1976 Olympics.

First job: At age 19, my father named me general manager of the Los Angeles Strings of World Team Tennis. Martina Navratilova was one of the team members, and we won the championship. I was hooked on the excitement of team sports and, of course, winning!

For dinner: Sushi at The Hump in Santa Monica with Phil and my special Christofle chopsticks

Talent I'd most like to have: To play any sport at an Olympic championship level

Dream date: Phil Jackson!!

Favorite value in others: I cherish honesty above all others.

Favorite city to visit: Tie between Venice, Italy, and Waikiki Beach, Hawaii

Favorite physical attribute: My smile—easily found when Lakers are winning

And least ... My lack of athletic prowess

My greatest love: My little dog, Princess Cujo

My hero: Billie Jean King. She is my inspiration.

My bucket list: 1. Go to Alaska; 2. Perform as a stand-up comedian; 3. Start a sanctuary for unwanted dogs.

My motto: Don't wait, do it now!

—Jeff D'Alessio

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Billy Gillispie

Kentucky basketball coach

First job: I worked at a pool hall for \$10 a week when I was 9. I swept the floor, racked the balls. ... With the money I made, I bought my own lawn mower and mowed yards for about \$3. I've had a checking account since I was 7 or 8. I bought all my school clothes since I was in second grade.



Angelo Dundee

Boxing legend

Superstition: I always went to a hairstylist on the day of a big fight ... that is until I went bald! Hey, you've gotta look good!

YOUR TURN Got someone you'd like us to go after?
E-mail Jeff D'Alessio at jdalessio@sportingnews.com

Next Gen

Recruiting diary

By Andre Debose
For Sporting News



About the author

Rivals.com rates Andre Debose as the 31st-best player in the nation and third-best wide receiver. The Seminole (Sanford, Fla.) senior has offers from many top programs, including Florida, Florida State, Miami, LSU, Ohio State, USC and Tennessee.

It's been a crazy week. I talked to (Florida) coach (Urban) Meyer and the offensive coordinator at Alabama, Coach (Jim) McElwain. I've talked to a couple of UCF coaches, and Oregon called my house, but I didn't get a chance to get back in touch with them. But that's about it.

They usually start off asking how I'm doing, and then they get straight to it. They all talk about how bad they need me on the depth chart and why they want me and how my speed would help them, how they'd use me. They tell me how I'm on the top of their list, stuff like that.

Sometimes I think about how it's the same old stuff, and then I come to my senses when I think about how a lot of people don't get this kind of attention—and I'm glad I get it.

Coach Meyer was one of the first coaches I talked to. I asked about how Percy (Harvin) was doing. He let me know how they run things and how the depth chart would work. He said I could play early.

I get letters every day. I get written letters, about 10 to 15 of them, every day. With Georgia, the whole coaching staff will send me an individual letter. I think that's kind of cool. One of the things that opened my eyes is a lot of the coaches lately have been saying that this time next year, I could be playing on TV for them. That's really made me think.

I talk to other recruits Russell Shepard (committed to LSU) and Aaron Murray (Georgia) the most. They're both after me pretty hard. They say they want to throw to me. Me and Russell talk a lot. I can talk to him about anything; he's almost like one of my homeboys.

The coaches tell me every time we talk on the phone not to rush things. They say, "Don't worry, we're not trying to pressure you." I don't worry about hurrying things. I don't think I'll be waiting until signing day, but most likely I'll commit at the Under Armour All-American game.

—As told to Brian McLaughlin



James Davis

Pro or no?

Being a college star doesn't mean stardom awaits in the NFL—in fact, some of the best college players will struggle to hold down a job. *Sporting News* draft expert Russ Lande, a former NFL scout, analyzes three standouts' pro potential:



PRO James Davis, RB, Clemson

Davis, who nearly came out after his junior season, is a solidly built back with good playing strength, and he consistently runs hard with the ball. He has the speed to hit the hole and take runs the distance, and he has the balance and athleticism to gain yards after contact. He is not a premier prospect—just ask Alabama's defense—but he has the talent to be a productive starter in the NFL.



NO Colt McCoy, QB, Texas

McCoy, a junior, has received a ton of national attention for his play at Texas but will need a lot of work to make it in the NFL. He has a strong enough arm to make all the throws, but his footwork is sloppy and he does not drive into his throws aggressively. He has the talent to start in the NFL, but if his technique does not improve greatly it's unlikely he'll ever be more than a backup.



PRO Arian Foster, RB, Tennessee

Foster is a big, strong back who runs hard with the ball and has shown the ability to break tackles and gain yards after contact. He has good vision/instincts and is able to make the quick cut to get through the backside hole, but he lacks explosiveness through the hole and the top-end speed to consistently make big plays. He is not going to be a big-play back but can be a move-the-chains starter.

Price has made rapid progress since he was picked first overall in the 2007 amateur draft.



3 Questions with ... Durham Bulls LHP DAVID PRICE

Q: Rays fans are eagerly awaiting your arrival.

How do you deal with thoughts about being called up?

A: Every time I'm about to step on the rubber, I say to myself, "One more time. Right here. This is it." After my next start, I want to be called up to the big leagues. After my next start after that, I want to be called up to the big leagues. It keeps progressing just like that. I don't put pressure on myself, thinking I have to throw five perfect games in a row for the Rays to call me up.

Q: One reason the Rays have been so good is the consistency in their rotation. Are you OK with being a power arm out of the bullpen if that's what they need? Does the role matter to you?

A: Not at all. They're winning right now, and that's

awesome. They deserve it; they work hard. I just want to be a part of it. To be honest, if that means being a batboy or a ballboy, I want to be in the Trop with them every night, watching them win and trying to help them win in any way possible.

Q: Rays VP Andrew Friedman mentioned that there were some things developmentally that the team was working on with you. What's one of them?

A: About the only thing we've really been working on is throwing my changeup more. Not that it's a bad pitch; I just really haven't thrown it a whole lot because I haven't really needed it. Now, I'm really in the mindset of not throwing too many sliders out there, just working on changeups and having them crushed all over the yard.

—Ryan Fagan

Price is right

Not since Nuke LaLoosh toed the rubber has there been more buzz about a pitcher in Durham, N.C. David Price, the top pick in the 2007 draft, was called up to the Class AAA Bulls last month after going a combined 11-0 at Class A and Class AA.

Team (class)	G	IP	W	L	ERA	H	R	ER	BB	K
Montgomery (AA)	9	57.0	7	0	1.89	42	13	12	16	55
Vero Beach (Advanced A)	6	34.2	4	0	1.82	28	7	7	7	37



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Sports Biz

What were they thinking?

When the Mets drafted lefthander Scott Kazmir with the 15th pick in 2002, they figured he'd go on to lead the league in strikeouts, as he did last year, and win an All-Star Game, as he did in July.

They just never figured he'd do it as a Tampa Bay Ray.

The July 2004 trade that sent the "Kazmanian Devil" from New York to Tampa Bay in exchange for Victor Zambrano (1-5 since 2006) is poised to go down as one of baseball's most lopsided. So why did New York deal its prized pitching prospect? We caught up with the two G.M.s behind the trade—Jim Duquette, then of the Mets, and Chuck Lamar, then of the Rays.

Duquette: "Before we made the deal, the main discussion we had centered around trying to figure out how to reduce our payroll while still trying to win and be competitive. We thought Zambrano was a good fit for all of that. He was one of the top pitchers in terms of stuff in the American League. His

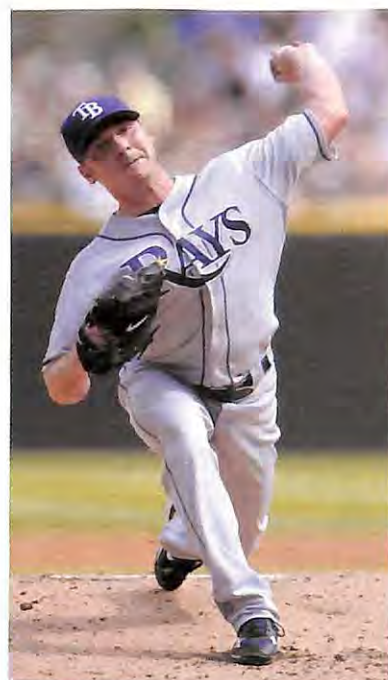
stuff was pure electric, but there were games when he would lose command."

Lamar: "We thought the Mets had made an outstanding pick when they drafted Kazmir. When the trade came up, Bart Braun, our assistant G.M., and Tim Wilkin, our scouting director, scouted Kazmir in Binghamton, where he was in Double-A. That confirmed everything we had thought about him. I remember asking them how close to big league-ready he was. They said he was very close—he could come up immediately, though they would have rather not rushed him.

"I asked, 'What if I have to throw in another player?' They said, 'If you get a chance to get Scott, do it.'"

Duquette: "Our medical people thought Kazmir would break down and that Zambrano was healthy. In hindsight, we were wrong on both counts."

Lamar: "When we made the deal, I thought it was a good baseball deal. We were getting a very good prospect. But we were giving up our



The Mets thought Kazmir would break down; instead, he has four straight seasons with at least 10 wins.

best pitcher, who had room to get even better. We didn't think we were pulling one over on the Mets at all."

Duquette: "We probably included 10 to 12 people in the Mets' organization in that trade—scouts, front office people, player development guys and on-field staff. There were definitely dissenting opinions, but it was hard for them to be heard."

— Matt Crossman

MONEY TALK

Reportedly facing heat from sponsors, the LPGA will make English the official language of women's golf next season. The LPGA backed off plans to suspend players who fail oral exams but reserved the right to hand down fines. Which got us thinking: What if they tried that in other sports?



Brian Burke



Doc Rivers



Steve Kerr



Matt Diaz

NHL
Brian Burke
Ducks executive VP/G.M.

"As an attorney, I have grave doubts that this will withstand a challenge. As a sports executive, I find it offensive. Athletic ability and playing within the rules has always been enough. Athletes that don't learn the language will suffer from less than full acceptance here and in terms of endorsements. But they should still be permitted to compete."

NBA
Doc Rivers
Celtics coach

"The NBA would never make a decision like that. It's called the 'world championship.' The NBA is global basketball. It would never limit itself to English-speaking players. In a team game where communication is so important, the NBA has proven the language barriers can be (broken) with the right teamwork. It should always be about the performance on the floor, not what's said or how it's translated."

Steve Kerr
Suns president of basketball operations/G.M.

"The analogy I would make is when (NBA commissioner David) Stern instituted the dress code for NBA players for similar reasons—to connect to disillusioned fans. As for the language thing, you can't play a team sport—especially basketball—without communicating. As a result, guys like Yao (Ming) automatically make efforts to learn English. All pro leagues depend on that connection to (their) fans to generate revenue in many different ways."

Baseball
Matt Diaz
Braves OF

"In a sense, baseball already does this, but in a much gentler manner. In most organizations, there are mandatory English classes during spring training and instructional league for players who may not have a grasp of the language. It is a necessary part of playing a sport here, from dealing with the media to asking an umpire a question. When I went to winter ball, the first thing I did was try to learn as much Spanish as possible."

— Jeff D'Alessio

Bank of America is close to a deal for the largest sponsorship at new Yankee Stadium. The "premier partnership" was being shopped earlier this year at a price of \$20 million annually.

NFL commissioner Roger Goodell has sent out a memo urging league staffers to control costs, saying revenue is "under pressure" during the current economic squeeze.

"Can You Moss?" That's what Pony asks in its new national marketing campaign promoting the Moss 1 Molded Signature Cleat, named after record-setting receiver Randy Moss.



Randy Moss

Under Armour is close to a deal to sponsor the NFL Scouting Combine. The first-of-its-kind arrangement challenges longtime league apparel partner Reebok, which has been the presenting sponsor of the NFL Network's coverage of the Combine the past two years.

The NBA renewed its deal with T-Mobile for another three years and also brought back the milk processors group as a partner, with initial plans calling for milk ads featuring Chris Paul and Candace Parker.

M&M's is hoping to piggyback on Kyle Busch's success by putting the driver in a striking all-red uniform and releasing a new line of "Rowdy Red" racing gear timed for the start of NASCAR's Chase for the Sprint Cup.

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What we're watching

From the football field to the dance floor

College football OHIO STATE AT USC

Saturday, September 13, 8 p.m. ET (ABC)

"Bring on O-S-who," former Trojans star LenDale White told anyone who'd listen after watching his favorite team rough up Virginia in Week 1. Expect more trash-talk from both sides right up until the kickoff of college football's game of the year. "If this were the Rose Bowl," *Sporting News* expert Steve Greenberg says, "it would be one of the greatest ever." And if this season plays out like many think it will, we could be watching a sneak preview of the national championship game.

NFL

WEEK 3 PRIME TIME COWBOYS AT PACKERS

Sunday, September 21, 8:15 p.m. ET (NBC)

JETS AT CHARGERS

Monday, September 22, 8:30 p.m. ET (ESPN)

Still haven't gotten your fill of the Aaron Rodgers-Brett Favre saga? Fans will get a double dose of it over two nights in prime time, with Act 2 pitting Favre against SN's pick to win it all. Ron Jaworski, who'll call the Monday nighter on ESPN, expects Ted Cottrell's defense to greet Favre with "a very aggressive, attacking zone blitz that loves to get after the quarterback. What makes the Chargers even more difficult this year is the fact that both corners, Antonio Cromartie and Quentin Jammer, are outstanding players."

Entertainment

DANCING WITH THE STARS, SEASON 7

Mondays, starting September 22, 8 p.m. ET (ABC)

The early scouting report on Warren Sapp: "He could win. He's got some good moves," says Cloris Leachman, the 82-year-old actress who'll join the recently retired NFL sackmaster on this season of ABC's hit show. Only one gridiron great (Emmitt Smith) has had the last dance, but athletes have won each of the past four seasons. This year's field also includes a pair of Olympic gold medalists—Maurice Greene and Misty May-Treanor.



Warren Sapp isn't exactly known for being light on his feet, but *Dancing With the Stars* partner Kym Johnson might be able to give him a few tips.

You CAN'T COMPETE with

USC

Trojans coach Pete Carroll is better than you, and he'll prove it. He brought that attitude with him to Los Angeles eight years ago—and built an empire on it.

By Matt Hayes





There goes Pete Carroll. And everyone wants a piece of the hottest thing in Los Angeles, the dude with more cachet than Kobe. Can't cross the street on the pristine campus at USC without someone reaching and grabbing and groping.

The woman in the Lexus, the two guys with footballs to sign, the father of the megarecruit who hemmed and hawed two years ago and forced his son to drag out the inevitable well past national signing day.

"Got him around my finger now," Carroll says.

The question is, who isn't orbiting Planet Pete now that he has made the USC football roster the coolest place to be in college sports? This is what happens when life is competition, when the one and only thing that makes you tick is working to be the best and pushing everyone around you to do the same.

Want to know why USC is the model of all college football programs, why in eight short years Pete Carroll has gone from the hire no one wanted to the coach everyone is chasing? Why, creeping up on

a decade of domination, this is Carroll's most talented team yet at USC—and the most impressive collection of players in the history of the game?

Competition. A never-ending, insatiable need for competition.

The last day of fall camp came and went last month, and like he does every practice, Carroll wadded up a piece of gum he had worked over for the previous two hours and tried to hit the sideline from the middle of the field. Nearly got it.

We compete for a reason, you know. There are winners and there are losers—and don't let anyone insinuate any different. We compete with one another, with opponents, with ourselves. Sometimes it's for national titles or elite recruits. Sometimes it's something as insignificant as flinging a piece of gum at a line. Or a piece of tape that a USC equipment manager randomly places around the practice field so a 50-something former safety at Pacific can try to hit the line from 20 yards out.

Nailed that one.



Mustain (right) won the first eight games of his college career as a freshman at Arkansas, but he's only No. 3 on USC's depth chart at quarterback. Sanchez (left) is the starter.

"We may think we're competitive," says Raiders coach and former USC assistant Lane Kiffin, "But no one—*no one*—competes like Pete."

This, ladies and gentlemen, is what's at the root of Carroll's USC program—it starts with his persona, childlike and carefree outwardly and I'm-gonna-kick-your-butt inwardly. A dizzying, contagious whirlwind of "I'm better than you and I'll prove it."

Every. Single. Day.

When Carroll arrived at USC in 2001, he found a stale program with little emotion and less direction. And zero competition. In seven seasons since, USC has won two national titles and six straight Pac-10 championships. His teams have averaged 11 wins a season—this on the heels of a humbling stretch in which the Trojans failed to win double-digit games in 20 of the previous 21 years before his arrival.

But to truly understand the magnitude of what Carroll has meant to USC, and how he has completely reshaped the program, it's best to look at the failures. Because, really, that's what drives competition.

In seven seasons, USC has lost 14 games. The breakdown is staggering:

- Six losses in Carroll's first season—by a combined 29 points.
- Eight losses over the next six seasons—by a combined 30 points.
- Only once in eight years has USC lost by double digits—11 points at bitter rival Notre Dame in Carroll's first season. The Trojans have beaten Notre Dame by an average of 26 points every season since.

How has this transformation of Troy happened, you ask? Simple: players. And their need for competition.

Carson Palmer signed with USC in 1998 as one of the nation's top prep quarterbacks. His first three years were full of injury and inconsistency and, frankly, not working hard enough. Then Carroll arrived and the quarterback many within the program thought couldn't/wouldn't change, developed into the Heisman Trophy winner in 2002 and the first pick overall in the NFL draft.

"Pete forces you to look inside yourself and ask, 'Am I really competing or just going through the motions?'" Palmer says. "Few guys can reach players and motivate like he can. How badly do you want to compete and prove yourself?"



Linebackers (from left) Kaluka Maiava, Cushing and Mauuluga face fierce competition in practice—and love it.

Carroll wasn't the school's first choice to replace Paul Hackett—Dennis Erickson and Mike Bellotti were ahead of him—but when Carroll arrived at USC, the big draws to the big school hadn't changed in years: the huge recruiting base of Los Angeles and the ability to recruit nationally, the strong private school education, Hollywood, the sun and fun. Wasn't too hard to see where he could make a difference.

"Recruiting," Carroll says, "changes everything."

No team has signed more elite recruits this decade than USC. No team has had such a complete turnaround—from conference underachiever to national heavyweight—because of those players. Somehow, year after year after year, Carroll convinces 17- and 18-year-old high school All-Americans to follow the same kind of elite players from the year before and compete for playing time on a roster stacked and packed like the 405 freeway in rush hour.

Since 2001, the Trojans have had more four- and five-star recruits (on a five-star system) than any other team in college football. USC's recruiting class has been ranked in Rivals.com's top three the past six years—including hitting No. 1 three straight times from 2004-06.

"You get on the field and look at those guys," says Oregon safety Patrick Chung. "They're men. They are big guys who can really run. I mean at every position. How do you keep all those guys happy?"

That, everyone, is the million-dollar question. And there are two basic answers.

No. 1 comes courtesy of defensive tackle Fili Moala: "We're all cut from the same cloth. Everyone here was 'The Guy' in high school. If guys come here and say I was this and that in high school, well, fool, look around you. You're sitting in a locker room full of those guys, so don't get



USC football players come for the competition, but they stay for the fun—and not all of it is on the field. Carroll is an intense competitor, but he can be one of the guys, as he showed during the annual Salute to Troy Fan Fest.

it twisted. We personally take it upon ourselves to whoop their (expletive) and get that out of them."

And answer No. 2: competition. What else?

Four years ago Brian Cushing was one of the top five linebackers in high school football and could've played anywhere. Never even thought of USC while growing up amid the manicured lawns of Oradell, N.J. Then he took a visit to Los Angeles and spoke to Carroll. Then he watched the team practice and stayed for a game and saw how much easier it looked.

Carroll promised him two things: He'd be given an opportunity to compete as a freshman, and he'd be one of four five- or four-star linebackers the team would sign. Four years later, Cushing is an All-American candidate and a projected first-round pick in the NFL draft.

"I knew if I went somewhere else," says Cushing, "I'd always wonder if I could've competed at that level."

Patrick Turner grew up in Nashville, a deep and passionate base for Tennessee football. Who in their right mind wouldn't think Turner, the nation's No. 1 player overall in 2005, would play for the Vols? Hell, even Turner thought so.

But as he stood in the middle of Loker Stadium on the USC campus last month, soaking in his final "Salute to Troy"—a fan/booster party at the end of fall camp—his decision never looked better.

"I came here four years ago and watched practice," Turner says. "I was hooked."

This is what he saw: First team going against first team—a rarity in college football. It wasn't just 7-on-7 skeleton pass drills but full-go, 11-on-11 scrimmaging for 40 plays.

Midweek practices are legendary at USC. There are Competition Tuesdays and Turnover Wednesdays. Everyone's job is up for grabs every week. Doesn't matter where you sit on the depth chart, how young or old you are or what you did the week before in the game or in practice. Everyone gets a chance to work with the first team, and every drill is scored.

And with all those four- and five-star recruits filling up the No. 2 team, the competition is intense, the drama compelling. Last month, Hollywood types roamed the sidelines of the Coliseum for a scrimmage—which, for the most part, is more competitive than 80 percent of regular-season college games.

"Practice is harder than any game I have ever played; it's not even close," says center Jeff Byers, another five-star recruit who grew up 30 minutes from the University of Colorado but found his way to USC. "Since the day I arrived ... I played against guys (in practice) who were going harder, playing faster, than I would see in the games. You're thrown into the fire because they want you to play—they want to see who can help the team."

Last year, USC went 10 deep at the tailback spot, and eight were high school All-Americans. One, Emmanuel Moody, was second on the team in rushing in 2006 as a freshman and transferred to

The All-Pete Carroll Trojans

Draft position in parentheses



Troy Polamalu | Dwayne Jarrett | Ryan Kalil | Lofa Tatupu | Kenechi Udeze | Matt Leinart

Offense

QB Matt Leinart (1st, 2006)
RB Reggie Bush (1st, 2006)
RB LenDale White (2nd, 2006)
WR Mike Williams (1st, 2005)
WR Dwayne Jarrett (2nd, 2007)
TE Fred Davis (2nd, 2008)
OL Sam Baker (1st, 2008)
OL Taitusi Lutui (2nd, 2006)
OL Winston Justice (2nd, 2006)
OL Ryan Kalil (2nd, 2007)
OL Fred Matua (7th, 2006)
K Mario Danelo*

Defense

DL Kenechi Udeze (1st, 2004)
DL Sedrick Ellis (1st, 2008)
DL Mike Patterson (1st, 2005)
DL Lawrence Jackson (1st, 2008)
LB Rey Mauluga**
LB Lofa Tatupu (2nd, 2005)
LB Keith Rivers (1st, 2008)
DB Troy Polamalu (1st, 2003)
DB Taylor Mays**
DB Eric Wright (2nd, 2007)***
DB Kevin Ellison**
P Tom Malone (undrafted)

*Died after his junior season

**Currently at USC; all three players are projected first-round picks in the 2009 NFL draft.

***Spent first two seasons at USC and transferred to UNLV for junior year.

Ohio State is eager to prove it can win a big one

The routine is becoming painfully predictable—Ohio State stomps through the Big Ten... and gets stomped by an SEC team in the national title game.

Then the entire offseason is spent questioning whether the Buckeyes were worthy of playing in the big one.

Well, folks, sorry to break it to you: Jim Tressel's crew could be back there again, no matter how *Sporting News*' No. 2 team fares in the September 13 showdown with USC.

"If they don't win the national championship, it won't (end happily)," says Chris Spielman, a former All-American linebacker for the Buckeyes.

"No one really knows if it will be a happier ending, although we all hope it is," says former Ohio State running back Archie Griffin, college football's only two-time Heisman Trophy winner. "If we get to the national championship for the third year in a row, that would be great. Any team would be proud to participate three consecutive years."

So why will this season end on a cheerier note for Beanie Wells and friends? *Sporting News* turned to a few other big-name ex-Buckeyes for answers:



Brandon Smith (left) and Brandon Saine are two of the many Buckeyes who are benefiting from their national championship game experience.

"Experience. I think they have 40 fourth- or fifth-year players on this year's team. To say that they have been in two national championship games is an unbelievable amount of experience, and it's the same experience that the two teams they lost to had. Both were senior-oriented teams. Now it's a matter of them doing all the right stuff. And, as an alumnus of the Buckeyes, I can't take them losing another one."

—Cris Carter, wide receiver, 1984-86

"Because in prior years, we didn't have (freshman QB Terrelle Pryor.)"

—Tom Skladany, punter, 1973-76

"They have a great group of senior leaders mixed with exciting youth that hopefully can contribute by the end of the year. Traditionally, Coach Tressel's teams have finished the season strong."

—Jim Lachey, guard, 1981-84

"They've got all those guys back and they are a legitimate team that can contend or win the national championship. They have depth. Teams have to stop Wells, and when you do, that means you've got two wide receivers and a quarterback that can throw and catch the ball pretty darn well. They're sound and well-coached, and they're not gonna beat themselves. The USC game is pivotal, though."

—John Cooper, head coach, 1988-2000

—Derek Samson

Florida early in fall camp because, he says, he "wanted more playing time."

In 2002, Kareem Kelly was among the Pac-10's all-time leaders in receiving yards and receptions going into his senior season. Then a freshman named Mike Williams showed up, and a few Competition Tuesdays later, Williams was the team's No. 1 receiver.

"Some guys," says USC linebacker Rey Mauluga, "don't like to compete. Other guys live for it. Which side are you on?"

There goes Pete Carroll across campus, trying his best to get to his office at Heritage Hall while dodging the paparazzi of well-wishers. He is talking about competing, about how his brother Jim forced him to play every sport, every game when they were boys to test his desire to compete. "(He'd) be amused by putting me in situations where I had to win or lose," Carroll says.

Right on cue, quarterback Mitch Mustain, the high-profile transfer from Arkansas, walks by. An hour earlier, Mustain had lost again. He left Arkansas after the 2006 season because of a personality conflict with former coach Houston Nutt and transferred to USC because he wanted to "see if I could play against the best."

On this day he was told, for the second time in fall camp, that he had lost out on a quarterback competition. First it was for the starting job, and this time it was for the No. 2 spot. Now he's the Trojans' third-string quarterback behind junior starter Mark Sanchez and redshirt freshman backup Aaron Corp, and things couldn't look more bleak. Here he is, the former national high school player of the year, a guy who went 8-0 as a true freshman starter at Arkansas, staring at third string.

Now that's a deep roster.

"Mitch," Carroll says as Mustain passes, "stay positive."

And he believes in the power of positive thinking. Too many people, Carroll says, are worried about not performing well—be it sports or business, or the guy flipping burgers at the local diner. When you're consumed by the possibility of failing, you're not competing.

"I'm very fortunate that my way of looking at the world is something good is about to happen," Carroll says. "People that can't help going along avoiding the bad things, the pitfalls, find themselves dwelling on the things that can go wrong, the negative things. How you can get beat, how you can lose; those kinds of things."

"You can work to avoid that stuff from happening or you can work to see how far you can go. How far you can take it."

D.J. Shoemate arrived this fall as one of the nation's top high school receivers. One glance at the depth chart showed a unit deep with experienced five-star players: Turner, Vidal Hazelton, Damian Williams, Ronald Johnson.

Why would Shoemate, a high school All-American who could've played anywhere immediately, choose to compete with that group?

"It comes down to what makes you tick," Shoemate says. "What brings out your inner drive."

Three weeks into fall camp, Shoemate was running with the first team. He's now in the first rotation of five.

"Competing at everything," Carroll says, "can drive you crazy if you don't understand it."

There are winners and losers, all right. And there most certainly is a difference.



Carroll probably was involved in some kind of competition with himself when he looked this ball into his arms.

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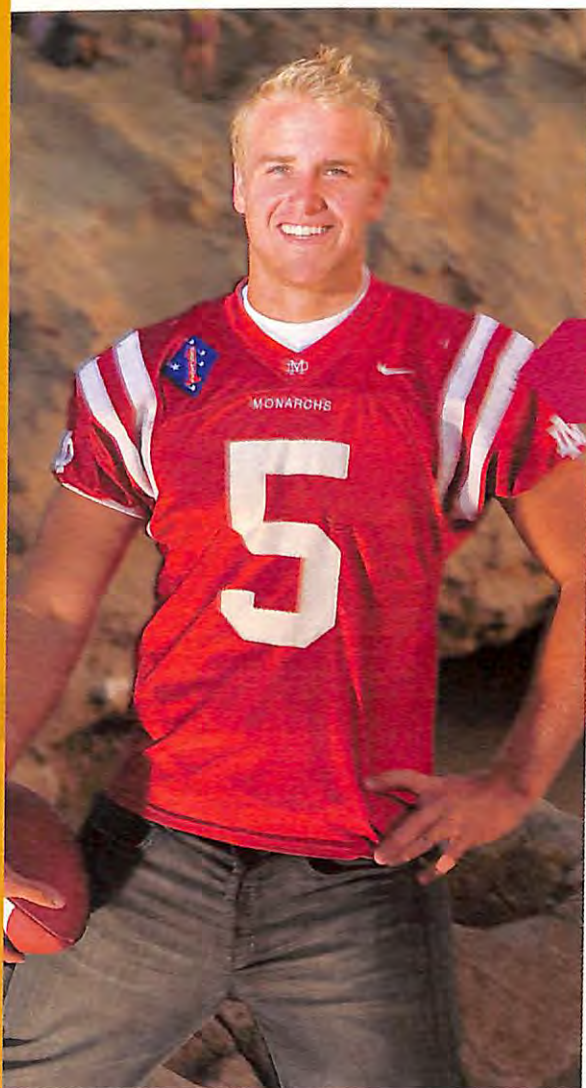


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Barkley has no trouble getting in line at USC. After all, it worked for another Mater Dei graduate, Matt Leinart.

Simply the best

USC has commitments from 15 players in the class of 2009, and four of those are five-star recruits, according to Rivals.com. On the Trojans' current roster, there are 18 five-star guys. So why do the top-rated players continue to go to USC—where many of them know they'll be backups—when they could start right away at another school? *Sporting News* tracked down a few of them to find out.

Matt Barkley

Mater Dei (Santa Ana, Calif.), QB, 6-3/226

Rivals.com rank: No. 1 overall.

USC Comparison: Matt Leinart. Barkley even attends the same high school Leinart did.

Why USC? "I think one of the main things is definitely Coach (Pete) Carroll and what he's done for the football program over the last couple of years. For me, I just wanted to be a part of that, and a lot of other players did, too. Across the country, there's a respect for USC. When I got my scholarship offer, I was really stoked. I was really waiting for that one."



Patrick Hall

St. Bonaventure (Ventura, Calif.), ATH, 6-1/181

Rivals.com rank: No. 15 overall, No. 1 athlete

USC comparison: Reggie Bush. Like Bush, Hall could play anywhere on the field and be a difference-maker.

Why USC? "I figure the best want to play with the best. All the guys who've committed are five- or four-star guys. So that shows you they do it right. ... I figured if I got an offer, I would commit. It's where I wanted to be, my childhood school."



Randall Carroll

Cathedral (Los Angeles), WR, 5-11/175

Rivals.com rank: No. 19 overall, No. 2 receiver

USC comparison: Lynn Swann. Carroll could leave as one of the all-time great USC receivers.

Why USC? "It's in the best city in the world. I think there might be schools with better facilities, but the coaching and hard work and determination is better than everybody else in the country. Not every school has a first and second team like SC does. Nobody practices like them."



Byron Moore

Narbonne (Harbor City, Calif.), S, 6-1/188

Rivals.com rank: No. 93 overall, No. 8 safety

USC comparison: Sammy Knight. Both are 6-1 and are big hitters and good run stoppers.

Why USC? "There's just something about it when you step on campus. There are just so many Heisman winners and All-Americans who played there. It makes you feel like you're at a prestigious school. It makes you not want to leave when you're there, and I just didn't feel the same way at most schools. Coach Carroll tells you that once you commit, you're a Trojan for life and he's going to take care of you."



James Boyd

Jordan (Los Angeles), ATH, 6-4/230

Rivals.com rank: No. 231 overall, No. 17 athlete

USC comparison: Lawrence Jackson. The athletic Boyd, who played QB and defensive end in high school, is just now beginning to put on the kind of weight Jackson, a 2008 NFL draft pick as a defensive end, has.

Why USC? "It just has a good background, a good history, and the coach is just great. He gets players to the next level, and it's a great environment to be around every day."

— Brian McLaughlin

Raking in the blue chips:

SN's preseason top five

Current rosters

School	★★★★★ 5-star	★★★★ 4-star	★★★ 3-star
1. Georgia	4	44	31
2. Ohio State	7	38	27
3. USC	18	40	14
4. Oklahoma	6	36	31
5. LSU	4	43	29

2009 commitments

School	★★★★★ 5-star	★★★★ 4-star	★★★ 3-star
1. Georgia	0	9	4
2. Ohio State	1	17	7
3. USC	4	10	0
4. Oklahoma	0	5	13
5. LSU	2	11	4

All ratings/commitments are according to Rivals.com.



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A road never traveled

LSU's **Andrew Hatch** is no superstar, but it's safe to say the path he took to become the starting QB for the defending national champs is one no one else has followed

By Dave Curtis

Life has dropped Andrew Hatch behind Harvard University's storied gates and on a surgeon's slab, his football future in the balance. It has dressed him in a Latter-day Saints missionary shirt-and-tie wardrobe on the streets of Chile and in a crimson and white football uniform, which he wore in the junior varsity version of New England's most famous college football game.

But this most recent setting seems to suit Hatch the best. He lives in Baton Rouge, La., as a sophomore at football-mad LSU. And somehow, three years removed from the JV stint at Harvard, two years after spreading the Book of Mormon in South America, Hatch is the starting quarterback for the defending national champions.

"I always hoped," he says, "that I'd end up in a situation like this."

Hatch's journey to his dream job ranks among the wildest in the sport. The move from Ivy Leaguer to missionary to the face of LSU football makes him a novelty for now. But the kid from Nevada seems serious about adding another chapter to his odd biography, one that ends with him hoisting a trophy.

"That was what I liked about him," Tigers coach Les Miles says. "He was a Harvard guy, really picked up our system well. But he was serious about being a serious football player that would contribute to our program."

Add Miles to the list of head-shaking folks who consider Hatch's story

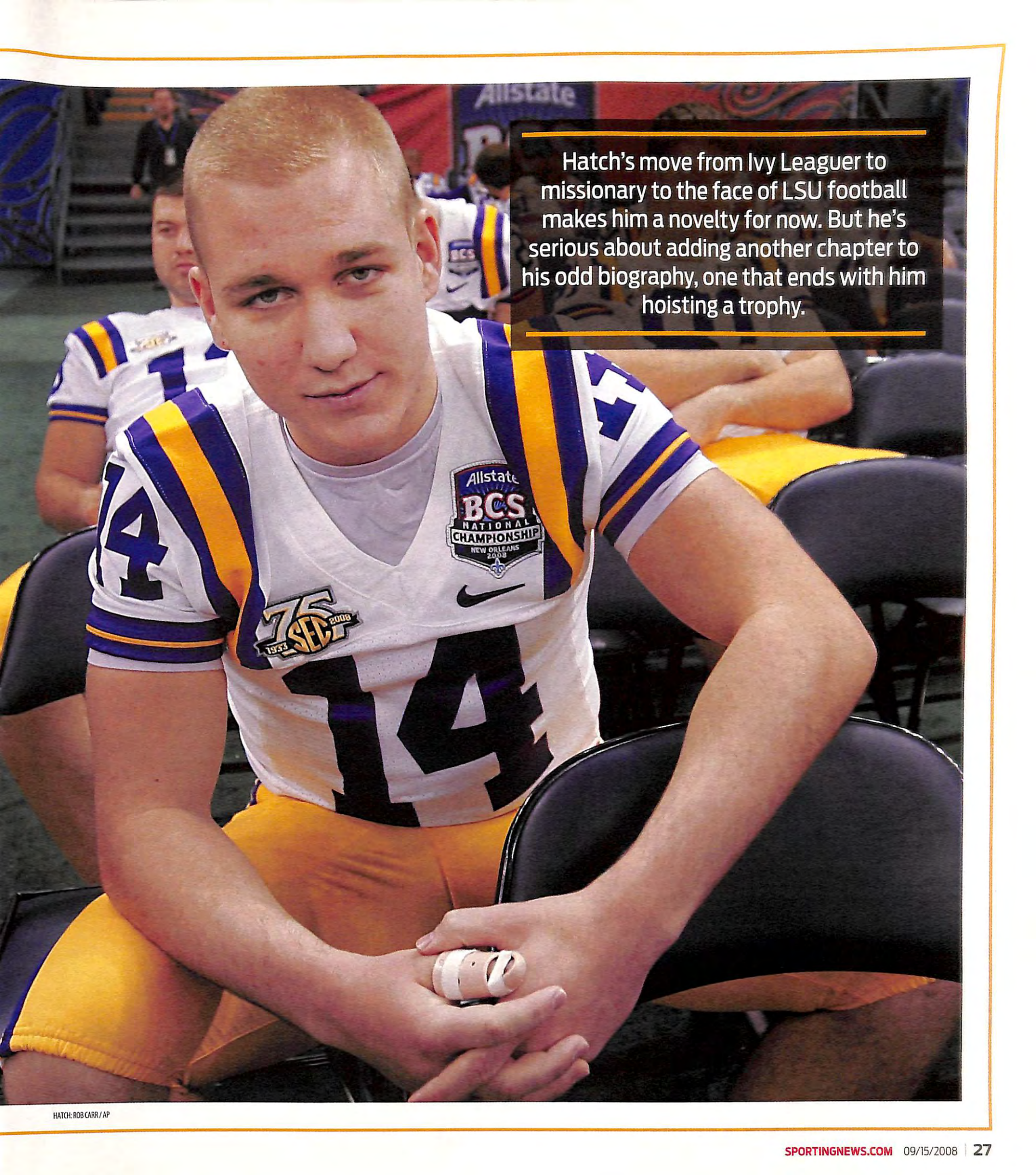
extraordinary. He shrugged when offensive coordinator Gary Crowton knocked on his door in the summer of 2007 with news of a quarterback looking for a place to play. The Tigers were short on quarterbacks with JaMarcus Russell leaving early, so why not? Let this Hatch kid walk on.

By the start of the season, Hatch had earned a scholarship. And with starting quarterback Matt Flynn banged up and backup Ryan Perrilloux in and out of trouble all fall, Hatch crept to No. 2 on the depth chart. This spring, after Flynn had graduated and Perrilloux had been tossed from the team, Hatch stayed neck and neck with freshman Jarrett Lee for the top job.

He earned the start in LSU's opener against Appalachian State, and on national television, Hatch hit Demetrius Byrd with a 17-yard touchdown pass, the first of his varsity career. The rest of the Tigers mobbed Hatch after the TD throw, marking a stark contrast from a year ago. Then, he was more punch line than leader. Teammates wondered aloud in the locker room how a kid from Harvard would last an afternoon in the SEC.

"There were some nicknames, people calling him 'Harvard' and that stuff," LSU running back Keiland Williams says. "A couple people wanted to know what classes he took. But then he showed he was a good quarterback. And it didn't really matter where he came from."

Oh, if only they knew.



Hatch's move from Ivy Leaguer to missionary to the face of LSU football makes him a novelty for now. But he's serious about adding another chapter to his odd biography, one that ends with him hoisting a trophy.

Hatch's life wasn't Best Picture-worthy through his prep days. A star athlete and decent student who finished his high school career at Cimarron-Memorial High in Las Vegas, Hatch in 2004 gave Crowton, then head coach at BYU, a verbal commitment to play quarterback for the Cougars. But when that season ended, administrators canned Crowton and Hatch turned his back on BYU.

He also chose not to follow Crowton, who landed as offensive coordinator at Oregon, but when Hatch juggled his remaining college opportunities, he found a home.

Of all places, Hatch chose Harvard.

"There were other places I could have gone," he says. "But I figured if you have the opportunity to go to a place like Harvard, it's too good to pass up."

Hatch, at 6-1 and 200 pounds, headed east to play for Tim Murphy and the Crimson. And upon his arrival in the summer of 2005, he learned that what he had heard was true: Harvard has morphed into a small-time Quarterback U. This decade, the Crimson have sent Neil Rose and Ryan Fitzpatrick to the Hula Bowl, and Fitzpatrick became the first Ivy League quarterback drafted since 1984 when the Rams chose him in the seventh round in 2005.

Hatch started his career behind Liam O'Hagan, who led the Ivy League in total offense in 2005, and classmate Chris Pizzotti, a first-team all-Ivy selection a year ago.

So with no shot at starting on varsity, Hatch got his playing time during junior varsity games on Fridays and Sundays. The Crimson play about five such games per year against Ivy foes, and because the Ivy does not permit nonmedical redshirts, junior varsity is a valuable outlet for players and coaches alike.

"We saw he had the ingredients," Murphy says. "He was bright and intelligent. There were times when he would make something out of nothing. He definitely had the potential of being a really good Division I quarterback."

But football anywhere would need to wait two years while Hatch fulfilled his church obligation on a 2006-07 Mormon mission to Chile. He roamed the country trying to convert locals looking



Hatch will have to play well to keep his starting job, but he couldn't have gone from Harvard JV to starting for the defending national champions if he weren't up for a challenge.

for something different than the Catholicism that dominates the area. And at night he tried to make friends in the community, which led him to a neighborhood soccer game during his fifth month in South America.

Hatch remembers getting undercut as he charged upfield, and soon after he fell, his left knee started to swell. He limped around for another teeth-gritting month and a half before heading back to the United States for treatment, which revealed torn meniscus. Doctors operated late in the spring of 2006, and Hatch returned home to rehabilitate with nowhere to preach and nowhere to play.

That's when Wendell Hatch, Andrew's father, tracked down Crowton, whom he had grown to admire during Andrew's original

recruitment. The elder Hatch knew Crowton had worked with Oregon director of football operations Jeff Hawkins, who doubled as the director of the annual Manning Passing Academy in Louisiana. Andrew was looking to get back into football, Wendell Hatch said, and maybe a counseling gig at the academy could help him land a scholarship.

Crowton, who left Oregon to become offensive coordinator for Miles at LSU shortly after the 2006 season, did one better. He remembered the skills and intangibles Hatch showed at Cimarron and bet, correctly as it turned out, that Hatch had grown since his high school days. So instead of going to Louisiana to teach high school kids, Hatch went there to play against college kids in

one of the nation's top programs.

"If I thought he could handle our system at BYU, I figured, why can't he do the same things here?" Crowton says. "There were no reservations. And once he got here, he was a great fit. And look how it's all worked out."

Hatch got on the field early last year, throwing two passes in mop-up duty during a rout of Middle Tennessee State. A shoulder injury, Flynn's steady play and the return of Perrilloux kept him on the sideline the rest of the season. So Hatch earned respect in the film room, built his now 6-4 frame to 225 pounds and enjoyed his place as a bit character in a national championship run.

He soaked up thrillers against Kentucky, Alabama and Arkansas in environments he figured he'd never visit. He won an SEC championship ring and more jewelry after his Tigers smacked Ohio State in the national title game. And he was big news in Cambridge, Mass., where Harvard football suddenly had a big-time rooting interest.

"We're going to Cornell, and somebody hands me a *USA Today* and points to a picture on the cover," Murphy says. "They said, 'Look again.' I did, and there's Hatch, right in the middle, after one of their big wins. Nobody could believe it."

The irony, Murphy says, is that Hatch would not be Harvard's starter this year if he had completed the mission and returned, as scheduled, for this football season. O'Hagan and Pizzotti both received rare medical hardship waivers to play a fifth year for the Crimson, who started the season ranked No. 24 in Division I-AA.

Hatch does have a starting job for the reigning I-A king in Baton Rouge. Lee will challenge him at every turn and get plenty of snaps, and true freshman Jordan Jefferson, a more athletic option, lurks as well.

Still, the champs opened their season in Death Valley with Hatch behind center, in front of 92,000 of college football's most passionate fans who were studying his every motion.

Just one more unexpected scene from the life of Andrew Hatch.

"It's pretty amazing," Hatch says. "Some people have told me things like this aren't supposed to happen—Harvard to LSU."

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Rank 'em if you got 'em: The top QBs



1 "Pat White is a terrific athlete who truly makes West Virginia go, but I believe he is rated too high for being so much more proficient as a runner than as a passer. Tim Tebow sets the standard for me as a dual guy."

— Charles Davis, FOX analyst and former Tennessee DB

2 "Tim Tebow has to be No. 1. He's the Heisman Trophy winner."

— Jamarca Sanford, Mississippi S

5 "(Matt) Stafford should be No. 1. He has excelled with not great talent at wide receiver and tight end. He has a bazooka for an arm and great touch and makes all of the throws."

— Gino Torretta, Miami's 1992 Heisman Trophy winner

8 "The top two should be Matt Stafford and Mark Sanchez. Stafford is going to be ready for the NFL after this year. He's got a strong arm, great mechanics, the whole package. And when Mark Sanchez gets more experience, he'll be in the same category."

— Carson Palmer, USC's 2002 Heisman Trophy winner

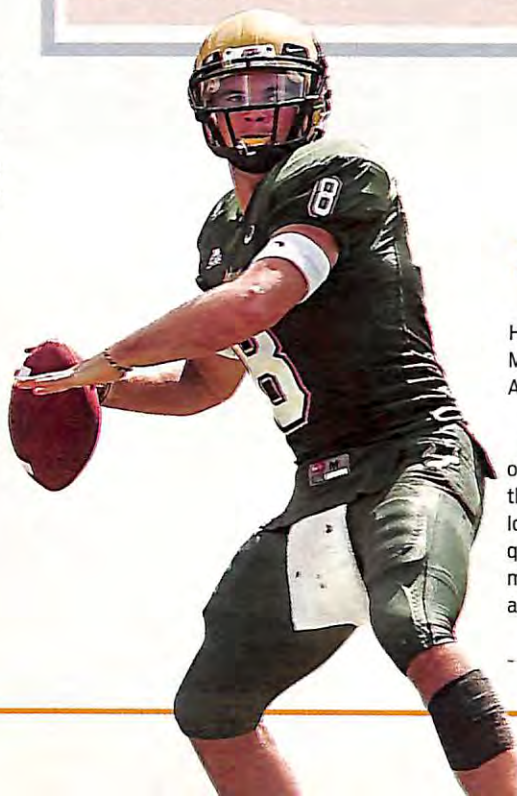
9 "Cullen Harper is legit. He knows that offense in and out. They were on the field for 90 plays last year and we hit him good. But he just stood in the pocket strong and made good throws. He's definitely one of the best in the country."

— Orion Martin, Virginia Tech DE

20 "Jake Locker is No. 20? Are you out of your mind? When they make the movie about Tim Tebow, they will have to get Jake to play the part."

— Jerry Glanville, Portland State coach

1. Pat White, West Virginia
2. Tim Tebow, Florida
3. Sam Bradford, Oklahoma
4. Chase Daniel, Missouri
5. Matthew Stafford, Georgia
6. Graham Harrell, Texas Tech
7. Dan LeFevour, Central Michigan
8. Mark Sanchez, USC
9. Cullen Harper, Clemson
10. Curtis Painter, Purdue
11. Rusty Smith, Florida Atlantic
12. Kellen Lewis, Indiana
13. Willie Tuitama, Arizona
14. Todd Reesing, Kansas
15. Max Hall, BYU
16. Rudy Carpenter, Arizona State
17. Todd Boeckman, Ohio State
18. Nate Davis, Ball State
19. Josh Freeman, Kansas State
20. Jake Locker, Washington
21. Matt Grothe, South Florida
22. Hunter Cantwell, Louisville
23. Trevor Vittatoe, UTEP
24. Colin Kaepernick, Nevada
25. Colt McCoy, Texas
26. Brian Johnson, Utah
27. Juice Williams, Illinois
28. Zac Robinson, Oklahoma State
29. Kevin Riley/Nate Longshore, California
30. Riley Skinner, Wake Forest
31. Tom Brandstater, Fresno State
32. John Parker Wilson, Alabama
33. Brian Hoyer, Michigan State
34. Chase Clement, Rice
35. Chase Holbrook, New Mexico State
36. C.J. Bacher, Northwestern
37. Jonathan Crompton, Tennessee
38. Stephen McGee, Texas A&M
39. Tyler Sheehan, Bowling Green
40. Sean Glennon/Tyrod Taylor, Virginia Tech
41. Thaddeus Lewis, Duke
42. Daryll Clark, Penn State
43. Case Keenum, Houston
44. Cody Hawkins, Colorado
45. Adam Weber, Minnesota
46. Patrick Pinkney, East Carolina
47. Jimmy Clausen, Notre Dame
48. T.J. Yates, North Carolina
49. Drew Weatherford/Christian Ponder/D'Vontrey Richardson, Florida State
50. Mike Teel, Rutgers
51. Justin Roper/Jeremiah Masoli, Oregon
52. Joe Ganz, Nebraska
53. Jevan Snead, Mississippi
54. Andrew Hatch/Jarrett Lee, LSU
55. Andy Dalton, TCU
56. Tyler Lorenzen, Connecticut
57. David Johnson, Tulsa
58. Chris Todd, Auburn
59. Tim Hiller, Western Michigan
60. Taylor Bennett, Louisiana Tech



Who needs Y.A. Tittle or JaMarcus Russell to win big? Not LSU's Tigers, whose two national titles this decade have come with quarterbacks drafted 209th (Matt Flynn in April) and 225th (Matt Mauck in 2004).

There's no glamour guy under center this fall in Baton Rouge, La., either. *Sporting News* expert Matt Hayes lists the Tigers' 1-2 punch of **Andrew Hatch** and **Jarrett Lee** at No. 54 in his ranking of the top 60 QBs in Division I-A. (Check out the next 60 at sportingnews.com.)

Of course, not everyone agrees with Matt's rankings, as we discovered ...

28 "Zac Robinson should be listed higher. He's a great dual-threat quarterback. If the receiver is covered, he can duck and run and get you with his feet."

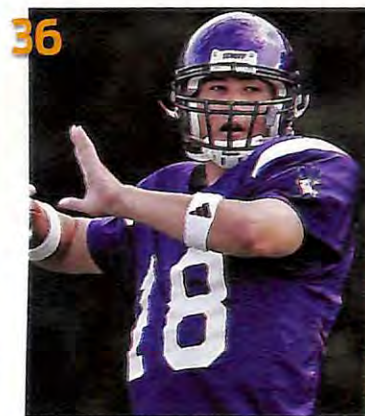
— Jake Ratliff, Texas Tech DE

30 "That's crazy. (Riley Skinner) is a great leader, led the nation in completion percentage and can run this offense better than anybody."

— Sam Swank, Wake Forest P/K

"That guy (Skinner) has got us two years in a row now. He is a hard worker and a great player. We're looking to try and figure out a way to beat him this year in Tallahassee."

— Budd Thacker, Florida State DT



"There's a lot of hype on this list. Some of the guys ranked pretty high haven't proven themselves in the college game yet. C.J. (Bacher) is a fifth-year senior who has shown that when he is on, he is one of the best there is."

— Brendan Smith, Northwestern S

41 "To me, Thaddeus Lewis is the most underrated guy on the list. He is a tremendous talent, but because Duke is not on national TV that often, people have not seen how good he is."

— Josh Nesbitt, Georgia Tech QB

44 "(I'm) too high right now. Where did we rank in wins last year? That's what my ranking should be."

— Cody Hawkins, Colorado QB

50 "The Rutgers kid (Mike Teel) should be higher. That team upset some pretty good programs. Says a lot about his intangibles."

— Kellen Clemens, New York Jets QB

21

"Matt Grothe should be ranked higher. He's a flat-out winner. He has been to Morgantown—and won. He has been to Auburn—and won. 'Nuff said."

— Bill Curry, new Georgia State coach

"Are you kidding me? No. 21? I've obviously played against a number of those quarterbacks here at USF and at Iowa State, and Matt Grothe is a top 10 quarterback. I would put him at 10 and maybe even higher just based on his athletic ability and versatility."

— Tyrone McKenzie, South Florida LB



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An open door

Giants coach Tom Coughlin had talked about having one for years, but he didn't secure his future until he meant it. A year and a half after nearly losing his job, he enters a new season with the best title in sports:

coach of the defending Super Bowl champs.

By Mike Vaccaro

Photos by Bob Leverone / SN







There was a time when clutching a trophy (above) may have been more important to Tom Coughlin than hugging a player, but last season taught him a lot.

He hasn't watched the full game yet, all these months later, if you can believe that. Tom Coughlin waited his entire adult life to get to that game, to work the sideline in a Super Bowl, to work it so magnificently—so perfectly—that his football team, across 60 minutes, could accomplish the unthinkable, execute the unimaginable. How many coaches get that opportunity? How many would have spent the rest of the winter, all of the spring, half their summer, even a few stolen hours of the new season, wearing out the rewind button on their DVD player?

Hell, wouldn't you?

"I will admit this much," Tom Coughlin says with a chuckle, reminiscing—if only for a few moments—about the 17-14 upset for the ages to which he guided his New York Giants last February, in Super Bowl 42, over the previously unbeaten and presumed-to-be-unbeatable Patriots. "I will admit to watching that fourth quarter a couple of times. And here's the thing: Every time I watch that quarter, I find myself yelling at the screen, 'Get away from them, Eli!' even though I know Manning gets away from them. I find myself screaming, 'Catch the ball, David!' even though I know Tyree is going to catch the ball. And I keep hoping we have enough timeouts in our pocket to keep that final drive alive, even though I know that we do. I'm coaching the game, even as I'm watching the damn thing."

The chuckle becomes a full-throated laugh.

"Coaches," he says, "are strange birds sometimes."

Folks in their profession can attract a lot of other descriptions, too. *Control freak* is a popular one. *Dictator* is always useful. *Autocrat* is a favored term. For as long as the job has existed, there has been a character profile of what we see a coach to be: He is Woody Hayes, raging at the wind; he is Bob Knight, scarlet in the cheeks with fury; he is Bill Parcells, curses

spewing from his lips as he cajoles his team to a higher place; he is Earl Weaver, turning his hat backward; or Billy Martin, kicking dirt on an umpire's shins; or Vince Lombardi, forever screeching into an invisible microphone: "Nobody's tackling out there, everyone's grabbing! Grab! Grab! Grab! Grab!"

Players, when they choose to be kind, have an expression for this.

"Old school," says Justin Tuck, a defensive end for the Giants whose blossoming into a star last season coincided with the Giants' exploding into a contender. "I think it's safe to say that Coach Coughlin comes from the old school."

But the athletes aren't always as kind as that, don't always pick their adjectives as carefully, and in the 21st century, *old school* doesn't always translate to the new age. Tom Coughlin nearly found that one out the hard way. Coughlin arrived in East Rutherford, N.J., in January 2004, and walking into the Giants' locker room back then was something like walking into a country club, where accountability took a distinct back seat to announce-ability. Everywhere Coughlin walked, it seemed he found football players auditioning for roles as commentators, columnists or pundits. Veterans had no trouble speaking their minds about working conditions, about playing time, about just about anything that crossed their minds.

"It was a little different," Coughlin says, "than what I thought the ideal work environment should be."

So he changed it. He declared that injuries would no longer be allowed to serve as excuses for losing or for poor play. He instituted a rule that would become known as "Coughlin Time," meaning that if you were supposed to be in a meeting at 4 o'clock, you were really supposed to be there at 3:55. Or earlier. Or else. He made it perfectly clear that there was one boss, that there was to be one voice, that if anyone had a problem with that they would be wise to keep it to themselves.

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"Depending on how you look at it," defensive end Michael Strahan explained not long ago, before he had retired from football and entered the broadcast booth, "he was either stubborn or close-minded. There was a mixture of opinions on that."

Coughlin knew no other way. He had played college ball at Syracuse under Ben Schwartzwalder, the kind of iconic coach all children of the 1950s and '60s wanted to play for. He had been an assistant coach working for the likes of Forrest Gregg, who had played for Lombardi, and Parcells, who many believed channeled Lombardi's spirit on the sideline. As a head coach at Boston College, "he was a presence everywhere he walked on campus," according to his kicker, David Gordon. In his first job as an NFL head coach, in Jacksonville, he'd had his fingerprints on everything from the birthing of that franchise to the 14-2 record the expansion team amassed in 1999, its fifth year of play. This was how things worked in football, Coughlin believed. It was a hard sport, attracting hard personalities and hard attitudes. He wasn't overseeing a coffee klatch. Football was supposed to be this way.

By 2006, though, he was forced to reconsider. The Giants had fallen from 6-2 to 8-8 and lost a wild-card playoff game to Philadelphia, and Giants fans

howled for change as Giants players whispered about Coughlin's methods. Tiki Barber, in his final days as a Giant, made no pretense about his distaste for his coach (an interesting path to take, considering Coughlin had personally solved Barber's fumbling problem during their first summer together, helping elevate Barber from a fine back with potential to a Pro Bowler; even Barber readily admitted that much). John Mara and Steve Tisch, the men who own the Giants, weren't deaf to the problems. But they are the sons of Wellington Mara and Bob Tisch, a couple of old school lions in their own rights, both of whom had fallen hard for Coughlin during the previous coaching search. The sons wanted Coughlin to give them a reason to retain him.

"I wanted to know," John Mara says, "that Tom knew there had to be ... I don't want to call them changes, necessarily, but differences. Clearly, the way we were going wasn't working."

And this is where Tom Coughlin unveiled the first surprise in what would soon be a year stuffed with them: He gave them precisely the answers they wanted to hear. Better, those answers weren't the desperate warblings of a desperate man trying to tell his bosses what they wanted to hear. Coughlin may have worked for Bill Parcells, but he had long idolized John Wooden. And it was through Wooden's words that Coughlin understood what he needed to do.

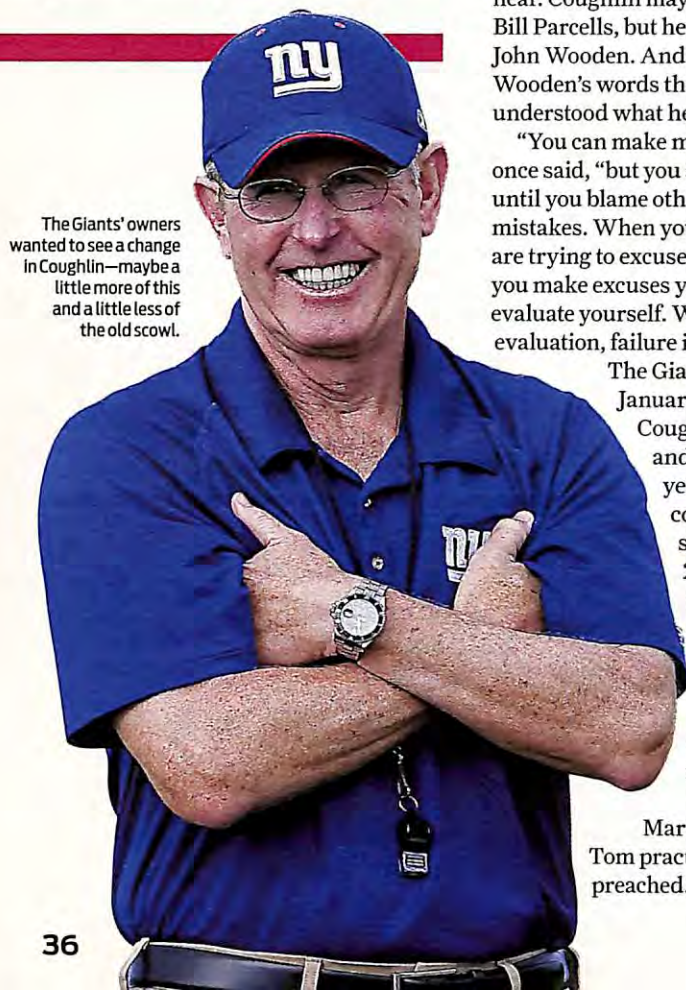
"You can make mistakes," Wooden once said, "but you are not a failure until you blame others for those mistakes. When you blame others you are trying to excuse yourself. When you make excuses you cannot properly evaluate yourself. Without proper evaluation, failure is inevitable."

The Giants announced on January 10, 2007, that Coughlin would return and would have a year added on to his contract. The Giants spent January 10, 2008, preparing for a playoff game with the Cowboys that would officially announce them as forces to be reckoned with.

"I would say," Mara says, "that Tom practiced what he preached."



Coughlin and Manning: Two guys who seem to be doing pretty well without Tiki Barber around.



The Giants' owners wanted to see a change in Coughlin—maybe a little more of this and a little less of the old scowl.

When Tom Coughlin talks of his "transformation," whether it's real or perceived, he targets one memorable conversation as the spark that allowed him to understand where his career was and where he wanted it to go. This was shortly after Mara and Tisch surprised—some might say defied—their fans by retaining him. Coughlin was sitting in his office at Giants Stadium, chatting with Charles Way, the former Giants running back who now serves as the team's director of player development. Way had read the strong, sometimes vicious media criticism of Coughlin. He had heard Barber's barbed comments. He had spent plenty of time in locker rooms, knew a doomed coach when he saw one and in his heart believed Coughlin bore none of those symptoms.

"Let me ask you a question," Way said.

"I'm listening," Coughlin replied.

"Why don't you let your players ever see you the way your children see you? Or the way your grandchildren see you? Or the way your friends see you?"

It was a familiar question, one Coughlin's wife, Judy, had often posed. Be yourself, she'd urged. Be Tom. That's enough for the people who care for you. It should be enough for the men who work for you.

"Before," Strahan says, "he'd tell you his door was open. But it wasn't always open."

Before, maybe Coughlin would have had difficulty listening to that critique. But before, he wasn't using both hands and both feet to keep his career from careening into the abyss. At some point, as winter brought spring and spring chased down summer and training camp beckoned, Way's words began to resonate. And Coughlin made



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Coughlin's taskmaster approach drew an uneven reaction from players at stops in Jacksonville (top) and Boston College.



a bold decision that would resonate for months.

"I finally had to convince myself that I might as well have fun, or as much fun as the job allowed," Coughlin says. "I figured, if this is gonna be my last year, I may as well enjoy it, enjoy the players, enjoy the circumstance. I realized that many of these players were good guys, that they'd earned a lot of things, they'd earned my trust, earned the ability to have the responsibility that we sent their way. They earned that right and those responsibilities."

But it was even more than that. Before training camp, Coughlin actually sat down with each of the Giants' six beat writers and asked them frank questions about himself, about the way he was perceived. Now that was a stunning development.

"They have jobs to do, same as me," he says. "And I realized, if I want them to understand the way I do my job, I should be willing to understand the way they did their jobs."

But there was more. During training camp, he hatched an idea for a night out in stifling Albany, a night away from meeting rooms so the team could go bowling. Bowling! Fred Flintstone bowls. Ralph Kramden bowls. Tom Coughlin? He took his team bowling. His team noticed. Later in camp, he devised a "leadership council," a small group of team-voted veterans who were to serve as a liaison between coach and roster. Some snickered at first. They'd heard this stuff before.

"This time," Strahan says, "the door really was open."

And this time, Strahan was one of the first men through. Maybe nothing symbolized Coughlin's subtle transformations more than the way his relationship with Strahan changed in 2007. For one thing, Strahan held out for all of two-a-days, for the whole month his teammates were sweating under the blazing upstate New York sun. In summers past, there was nothing that would get Coughlin's Irish up worse than a holdout, and all summer long, the people covering the Giants kept waiting for Coughlin to run out of patience, to bury Strahan, to resolve the holdout with a verbal blowtorch. It may well have been that Strahan was waiting for that, too. But that never happened. July gave way to August, August to September and finally Strahan ambled into Giants Stadium, shook hands with his coach and was warmly received. His teammates immediately voted him captain, a verdict Coughlin never even considered vetoing.

"It would be unfair to say that Coach changed," linebacker Antonio Pierce says. "What I think is fair to say is that the whole team grew up and matured. I've never been on a team that was more on the same page, top to bottom, coaches, players, everyone. I give everyone credit for that. But you always have to start with the man in charge."

The man in charge doesn't see it that way because in his ideal football world, players and coaches not only work from the same page, they author the page together. That is the part of Coughlin's reputation that always puzzled him. Every time he would hear Barber, for instance, rip his

methods or his interaction with players, he'd want to scream, "Don't you understand I'm not new to this? Don't you know I've dealt with players, and egos, and the fickle arithmetic of a 53-man roster for longer than you've been alive?"

Once upon a time, Mark McCabe was a linebacker and defensive end for Rochester Institute of Technology, personally recruited there by the brand-new 23-year-old head coach, a kid by the name of Coughlin.

"What he'd done, essentially, was invite me and all of my teammates to join him on a suicide mission," McCabe says. "We had a president who didn't care for football and he never wanted it in the first place, and he ultimately got it shut down. Coughlin used to always tell us about that, would say, 'You guys have to be perfect or they'll shut us down,' and we figured that was just him trying to play head games with us.

Turns out he was right."

McCabe laughs.

"But we played our (butts) off for him," McCabe says. "Every day."

Thirty-seven years later, 37 of those graying, paunchy members of Coughlin's RIT Tigers gathered in Rochester to watch their old coach work the sideline in the Super Bowl. McCabe was the one who organized it, and as more and more players responded with enthusiasm to his invitations it occurred to all of them how lucky they were.

"I hope," he says, "that in 40 years this group of Giants will feel about Coach the way we still do. We

weren't pros. We weren't close. But he coached us like we were."

And coached them, in essence, exactly the same way he coached the Giants last year.

"Here's what I think the key to me, to the team, to all of it is," Coughlin says. "Principles don't change. The idea of conducting yourself properly, as a professional, that never changes. How you apply it may differ from year to year, team to team. But if you're going to be successful, you don't ever sacrifice any of the things you believe in. Can you do a better job of communicating them? Absolutely. But if you believe in those principles, that's going to rub off."

He laughs.

"Maybe a year ago that would sound crazy," he says. "I don't think it sounds so crazy now, do you?"

Mostly, when Tom and Judy Coughlin have reminisced the past few months, they remember the early years, in Syracuse, making no money, building a family, the thought of striking it rich in coaching never crossing their minds. In truth, if Coughlin had a different kind of personality—or if he'd been married to a different kind of wife—it was then when he probably would have left coaching behind, gone into a line of work

I figured, if this is gonna be my last year, I may as well enjoy it, enjoy the players, enjoy the circumstance. I realized that many of these players were good guys, that they'd earned a lot of things, they'd earned my trust.

— Tom Coughlin



Make no mistake: Coughlin didn't let Brandon Jacobs and the Giants slack off during camp.

more stable, more fiscally satisfying. In those days, there seemed to be a surplus of children and a dearth of money.

There was one time Judy came to him, sick as a dog, and said, "I think I'm coming down with the flu."

"Yeah, you got the flu all right," Coughlin said, knowing before the rabbit died that child No. 4 was already on the way.

But Judy wouldn't hear of her husband abandoning a life he loved, a job he threw himself into. And Coughlin, when the kids were young, wouldn't hear of picking up stakes and moving to the farthest-flung corner of the football map just to get a job that was a fraction higher on the coaching fraternity's flow chart.

That's one reason Coughlin's resume looks a lot different than most coaches' dossiers, which often go on for pages at a time, 12 jobs in 13 years, always looking for a slightly better job in a

slightly more prestigious conference.

The other reason, which was a little harder blow to his ego, Coughlin explained to Parcells the first time Parcells talked to him about a job. Parcells, then coaching the Giants, looked at Coughlin's one-page resume and shook his head.

"Jeez," Parcells said. "It says here you were in Syracuse for seven years? Why the hell would you do that?"

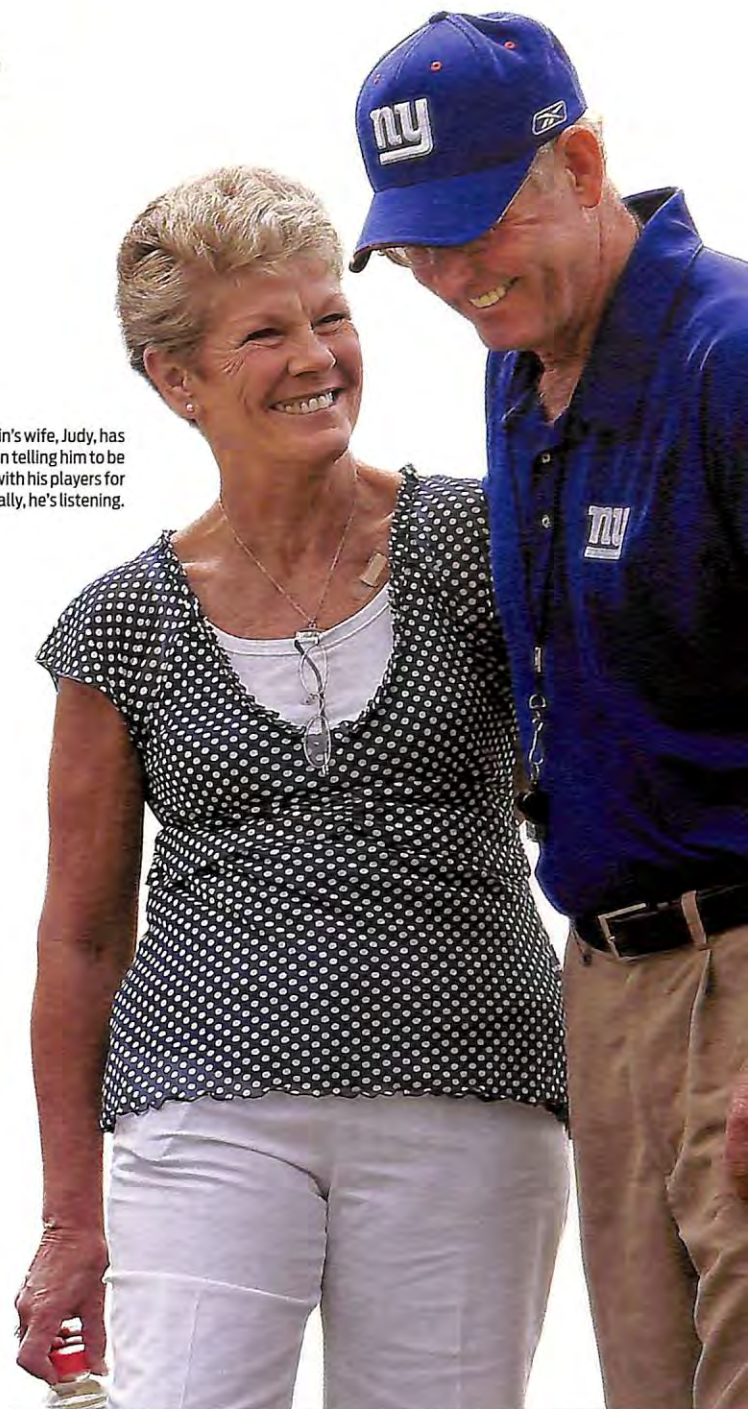
"Nobody else wanted me," Coughlin said.

It was a nagging sense that followed him all the way to Glendale, Ariz., all the way to University of Phoenix Stadium, all the way to a game for the ages and a fourth quarter that still makes him squirm as if he were watching it for the first time. A sense that will never haunt him again.

Maybe someday, he'll even give the first three quarters a try. He says he will.

"I like a happy ending," Tom Coughlin says.

Coughlin's wife, Judy, has been telling him to be himself with his players for years. Finally, he's listening.



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Tom Coughlin

Meet the **new boss**

Danny Clark has played for two Tom Coughlins—the tough taskmaster who drafted him in 2000 as coach of the Jaguars and this kinder, gentler fellow who helped convince the linebacker to sign with the Giants this summer.

"It was a rough road in our first interaction," Clark says. "I don't mean in a negative way; it was just tough. A lot of guys would run from it."

"This guy gave me my first opportunity, and he's a stand-up coach, he's successful. It wasn't hard to sell. He said to me on my visit, 'You're deciding between Houston and here? C'mon, that's Houston, an expansion team. We're the best organization in the world.'"

Clark remembers Coughlin's Jags training camps as "rough and brutal—and Coach was just the same." But when the two reunited this summer, Clark noticed, "This is not the guy who drafted me in 2000."

"We were talking about where we're from," Clark says, "and I said I think I have an Irish background. He said he has Irish background, (so) he urged me to go over to Ellis Island to see where our people came in. Things of that nature, I would have never dreamt of speaking to Tom Coughlin about."

It was August, and the Giants were coming off a dud of a preseason opener, a loss to the lowly Lions in Detroit. Of all times for Dave Tollefson to have to leave the team to be with his wife, Megan, who was giving birth ... in Omaha, Neb.

Football is important to the defensive end, but it's no match to being there for the birth of his first child.

"God bless Coach Coughlin," says Tollefson, who was not penalized for missing a few precious days of camp. "This is a big deal. He was understanding. He has kids and grandkids. This is my first child. I'm really grateful he does understand. It's huge for me for my son to be proud of his father, since I didn't have one."

Coughlin never thought twice about letting Tollefson split, even if it did put him behind in practice.

"When we are in camp, the most important thing we do is prepare for football," Coughlin says. "However, the real world certainly continues to exist for all of us. ... The birth of a child is a special, once-in-a-lifetime experience."

You know him as the growling, scowling Bill Parcells disciple who goes by the nickname **Colonel Coughlin**. But there's another side to Tom Coughlin that you don't see on TV, a side that he has only recently shown to his own players. **These are their stories.**

All preseason, Coughlin's players were quick to notice how much their coach had changed. When he pulled players off to the side in practice, as he did one day with defensive end Renaldo Wynn, no longer was it just to chew them out. Sometimes, he just wanted to chitchat.

"It wasn't even about football," Wynn recalls. "It was like, 'Hey, how you doing?' You see the sincerity. It's not like he's just coming up to you to say something just to say something."

Like Clark, Wynn was a member of Coughlin's Jags teams. Back then, it was all business all the time.

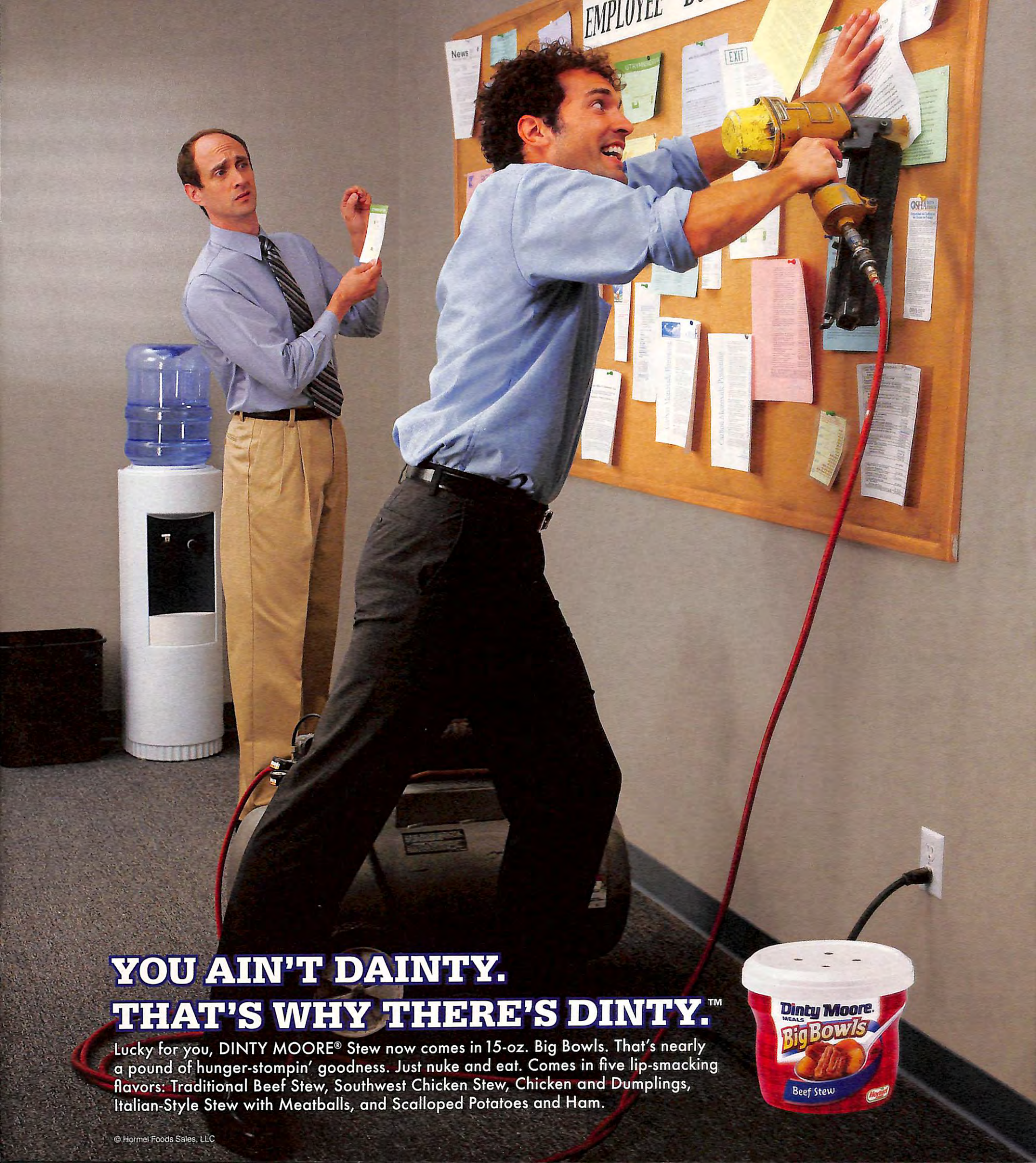
"It shows you he's evolved," Wynn says. "It shows you have to adjust in this league. It's a compliment to him that he was able to see that and make a change. I think you get more out of your players (that way)."

"I can get used to this right here."

—Paul Schwartz

Coughlin, goofing around with fans during training camp? This isn't the guy his old Jaguars players remember.





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WHEN MAN BECOMES

FAN

You've seen these iconic **NFL** fanatics on TV ... the guy from the Dawg Pound, the Packers pope. Now see them in their natural habitats—away from the stadium.

► **We know him as:** John Big Dawg Thompson (yeah, it's his legal name), 47-year-old vehicle operator and hockey nut from Cleveland.

► **You know him as:** John Big Dawg Thompson.

► **Thompson became Big Dawg ...**

In 1985, when he happened upon a costume shop's grand opening and laid eyes on the first generation of his now famous—and in its third generation—dog mask. "I immediately thought of how the Browns defensive backs that year were barking at each other in training camp, and I knew I had to have it." He bought it for \$10 and wore it to the team's next preseason game.

► **Question we had to ask:** Now that you're about 300 pounds lighter (down from 529 pounds), how much of Big Dawg's gameday gear had be downsized? "I only downsized the pants from a 76 waist to a 38 waist. I kept the jersey because I can wear many layers under my jersey in the winter."

Question Browns center Hank Fraley had to ask:

***Why do you wear No. 98?
Were you a lineman?***



"When I was as big as I was, it was hard to find a jersey. But a sporting goods store in Cleveland used to sell the jerseys from summer camp, and the size of the jersey went by the number. No. 98 was the largest size available, and it was actually a little snug. My mom—she's a tailor—had to put a gusset in each side."

► **We know him as:** Mikey T., 63-year-old engineer for the Department of Energy and self-proclaimed scratch golfer from Fairfax, Va.

► **You know him as:** Boss Hogette.

► **Mikey T. became Boss Hogette ...** After the famed "Hogs" offensive line led the Redskins to a Super Bowl 17 victory over the Dolphins, Mikey T. realized the no-names on the line needed their own cheering squad. Boss Hogette (who, like a superhero, prefers not to disclose his real last name) made his first appearance at Mikey T.'s grandmother's Halloween Tacky Tea Party in 1983. "I walked in there, and she lit up like a Christmas tree. She recognized the dress, but that was about it." The Hogettes, a group of cross-dressing, snout-wearing fans Mikey T. recruited as an entourage, made their first appearance at a Redskins game against the Eagles on November 27, 1983, at RFK Stadium.

► **Question we had to ask: What do your government co-workers think of the getup?**

"They're very supportive, as a matter of fact. I take a lot of leave to do the different benefits, and I usually have no problem getting off to go do a golf tournament or something."

Question Redskins running back Clinton Portis had to ask:

Where the heck are you going with all those chains on?



"My bling? That's for the Hogette Hop. When I jump up and down after we score a touchdown, it sounds like Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer and all of his pals are coming in for a landing."

Photo by Bob Leverone / SN





Photo by Bob Leverone / SN

► **We know him as:** Greg Good, 51-year-old classroom therapist from Winston-Salem, N.C.

► **You know him as:** Catman.

► **Good became Catman ...** In 1998, when a fellow fan yelled "Catman" to get his attention. "A lot of people don't know that—they think I gave the name to myself. But I got it from a fan." An original Panthers PSL owner, Good

morphed into a superfan when he realized he could positively affect the players on the field by inspiring the crowd around him.

► **Question we had to ask:** The hair is cool. How'd you decide on that, and where did you find it? "That's a trade secret. When I write my book, I'm going to disclose where the wig came from, and it's going to shock everyone."



Question Panthers quarterback Jake Delhomme had to ask:

With all that on, where is his litter box in the stadium?

"(Laughs) My litter box is in a hidden pocket on the inside of my cape."

► **We know him as:** John O'Neill, 56-year-old retired correctional officer and car enthusiast from Cross Plains, Wis.

► **You know him as:** St. Vince.

► **O'Neill became St. Vince ...**

Almost 12 years ago, just before the Packers' Super Bowl 31 victory over the Patriots. According to *When Pride Still Mattered* by David Maraniss, Lombardi's secretary recalled that Lombardi once showed up for work dressed in bishop's vestments and with a mitre on his head, playing a joke on those who called him St. Vince or The Pope of Green Bay. So, O'Neill says, "The idea of an actual St. Vince wasn't a big stretch of the imagination—at least not for me!"

► **Question we had to ask: How do the Catholics among the Packer backers feel about your outfit?** "I do try to be careful not to do anything as St. Vince that could be seen as disrespectful to actual members of the clergy. I've met several actual bishops and dozens of priests, nuns, etc. The great majority have no problem with what I do because they know where my heart is at."

Question Packers wideout James Jones had to ask:

Why? Why does he do it? What made you want to be St. Vincent? I want to know.



"James and the other football players are busy getting ready for the games and don't have the opportunity to see what goes on during the four hours of tailgating before kickoff. If they could see the interaction I have with the fans, young and old, any questions as to 'Why?' would be answered."

Photo by Jay Drowns / SN





► **We know him as:** Syd Davy, 50-year-old train engineer from Winnipeg, Manitoba.
► **You know him as:** 100 Percent Cheese Free.

► **Davy became 100 Percent Cheese Free ...** In 1986, when he donned a "100 Percent Cheese Free" shirt to get the better of a Metrodome Packers fan. He first wore the horns for a 1993 Halloween game against the Lions and has been adding to his costume in the years since: "The reaction was so big and the other fans loved it so much that no one has seen Syd Davy at a Vikings game since—only 100 Percent Cheese Free."

► **Question we had to ask: What do the muscles have to do with all this?** "When I was in my teens, I worked out at gyms that were filled with steroid users, and I have always been clean and refused use them. To (tick) off the steroid cheaters I had a shirt made with '100 Percent Steroid Free' on it."



Question Vikings safety Darren Sharper had to ask:

If you're a true, loyal Vikings fan, why isn't your whole body tattooed with just Vikings stuff?

"But, Darren Sharper, it is! The only tattoos that aren't Vikings or Vikings colors on my body are the logos of the teams that I caught Randy Moss against on his jumps into the stands—sort of like kills for a fighter pilot."

— Text by Erin Farrell, Jay Drowns

‘You wanna fire Ozzie Guillen, my cell phone will ring 30 times’

Sporting News Conversation:

Ozzie Guillen

The White Sox's controversial manager has a lot to say—and swears he isn't afraid saying it will leave him unemployed

When it comes to Ozzie Guillen and profanity, it's six of one, a half-dozen of the other. Or, more accurately, 71 of one variety and 36 of the other, as was the case over a recent one-hour, 16-minute interview with *Sporting News*' Steve Greenberg.

It's easy for a listener to become caught up in the storm of foul language that has earned the 44-year-old White Sox manager the derisive nickname Blizzard of Oz. It's harder to tell what it all signifies—does Guillen really mean many of the things he says? Sitting in the visiting manager's office in Baltimore before an 8-3 victory that put the White Sox two games up on the Twins in the American League Central, Guillen was crude, hilarious and unfailingly provocative. Much of what he said was simply unprintable. Cover your eyes if you don't think you can handle the rest.

SN: On a scale of 1 to 10, where are the 2008 White Sox?

GUILLEN: Seven. ... We miss a couple key players right now. One part of the season, pitching was carrying us. The other part, the offense was carrying the team. ... We really had the team intact maybe the first half of the season.

SN: And how does their manager rank?

GUILLEN: I don't know, I've never ranked myself. This is one of the toughest years in my career because we expect to win this year. I think the general manager (Kenny Williams) put a pretty good product on the field. I think the expectations are higher than they were in the past. If we win as many games as we can, then I'm a good manager. If not, I blame myself.

SN: Who has a better team this year, you or (Twins manager) Ron Gardenhire?

GUILLEN: As a team, we have more talent. The Twins have a different ballclub. They have more speed, better defense. We got more power, better offense. Our bullpens should be equal. But it's totally, totally the opposite ballclubs. They can beat you one way; we can beat you the other way.

SN: You pretty impressed with Gardenhire?

GUILLEN: I love him. I think people in Chicago get tired of hearing me say this, but if you're not managing the Boston Red Sox, the Cubs, the Dodgers or New York Yankees—or maybe the Chicago White Sox—you never get the attention that other managers get. And I think that's unfair. I think this guy's been having a great career as a manager, and nobody really (sees) how good he is. I think this man never get the credit he deserves.

SN: Who's the best manager in Chicago?

GUILLEN: Me. Because our division is *hard*. ... You're gonna face the Detroit Tigers 19 times, you're gonna face Minnesota 19 times, you're gonna face the Cleveland Indians 19 times. Now you're done with your division, and you got the Yankees and Boston. Every day in the American League, you have to compete. It's no doubt the ballclubs are deeper than in the National League. Maybe all the people in the National League will be all mad, but I will trade (for a) National League Central (schedule) in a heartbeat. I will take that with my eyes closed.



Ozzie Guillen

SN: Why do the Cubs, without a World Series win since 1908, get the royal treatment from the Chicago media and the national media?

GUILLEN: If (Carlos) Quentin was playing for the Cubs, he'd already be MVP. If (Alexei) Ramirez was with the Cubs, he would be National League rookie of the year. They talk about (Cubs rookie Kosuke) Fukudome more than they talk about Ramirez. ... The tradition of the Cubs is a little different than the White Sox. They got Wrigley Field. You go to Chicago, you no go to Wrigley Field? It's like you go to New York and you no go to the Statue of Liberty. Some people, they don't know (expletive) about baseball and they still like to go to Wrigley Field. ... If Frank Thomas was playing for the Cubs, he'd be a Hall of Famer two years before he retired.

SN: Who are your top three players in Chicago?

GUILLEN: Derrek Lee is the most complete player Chicago has. He's the best player in Chicago. The most under-the-radar player Chicago has is (Jermaine) Dye. Dye has been the best outfielder for the last five years, won the MVP in the World Series, had more consistent years than anybody in the league—and nobody give this kid any attention? That's the second-best player in Chicago. And Carlos Quentin (is third).

SN: Have players gotten softer over the years?

GUILLEN: Of course. I don't see that many fights between teammates. Not fights, disagreements. I remember when I grew up, one of my teammates don't like what I was doing, they go to me, and so do I. Now the players, they're so good of friends or they get along too good. They get on somebody's butt, they gonna lose the respect or the friendship. I don't see guys screaming, "Why you no run the ball, why you no went from first to third, why you no slide into second base and break up the double play, why you no hit that guy after we got hit twice?" Now everything, we gotta

Guillen's team doesn't get the love the Cubs do—even though the White Sox are the ones with the trophy.



GUILLEN: JAY DROWNS / SI



go through the manager, and it's not easy. A guy making \$20 million, and people think you can't do anything to them? (Expletive) it. I don't care if you making \$20 million or you making the minimum, you gonna play right or you no play for me.

SN: Do Venezuelan ballplayers come up tougher than American players? How about Latin players in general?

GUILLÉN: Mentally, they have to. ... I think the Latin players are smarter than American players in one way: It's hard to play the game when you don't speak the language. And you have to overcome that problem, the homesickness, maybe being criticized by somebody and you don't know what they're talking about, maybe you watch the TV and you don't know what the hell they're saying. Only

thing you can do is just play. You come up an American—and I say this because I have kids (in this country)—you go to college, you sign out of college and get \$6 million, you set for life. But a Venezuelan or Dominican, you just come here to *make* your life. ... And the competition is getting harder and harder because now you got Korean players, Japanese players, Chinese players. ... That's why I criticize a lot of teams—because what is the reason we bring Japanese translators, and Latinos no have one? What is the reason? Maybe because you have other teammates that are Latino, or one of the coaches? But what is the point when we have so many good Latino players, and we don't help anybody? ... Is it because there's less Asian players in the big leagues? Or do they have better treatment because they bring fans and TV and revenue to baseball?

The third-best player in Chicago? It's Quentin, says Ozzie. At least it was before Quentin broke his wrist.

JUST ONE QUESTION



For Jermaine Dye, White Sox RF
Ever met anyone quite like Ozzie Guillen?

"No way. He definitely keeps everybody loose. But you know what? I think he's good for the game. Well, somewhat good for the game. A lot of things he says are blown out of proportion, but in sports there's not really too many guys who will say what's on their mind and speak the truth."

SN: Do you ever wish you could suit up and play again?

GUILLEN: No! Play baseball? No! I'm done. ... I was only 36, could have played another three or four years, but I think I made the right decision. ... I hate when coaches say, "Oh, we would've made that play, we wouldn't do this and that—(expletive)." That's why you coaching. If you was making the play, you still be playing. The desire for me to play was over as soon as I take my uniform off.

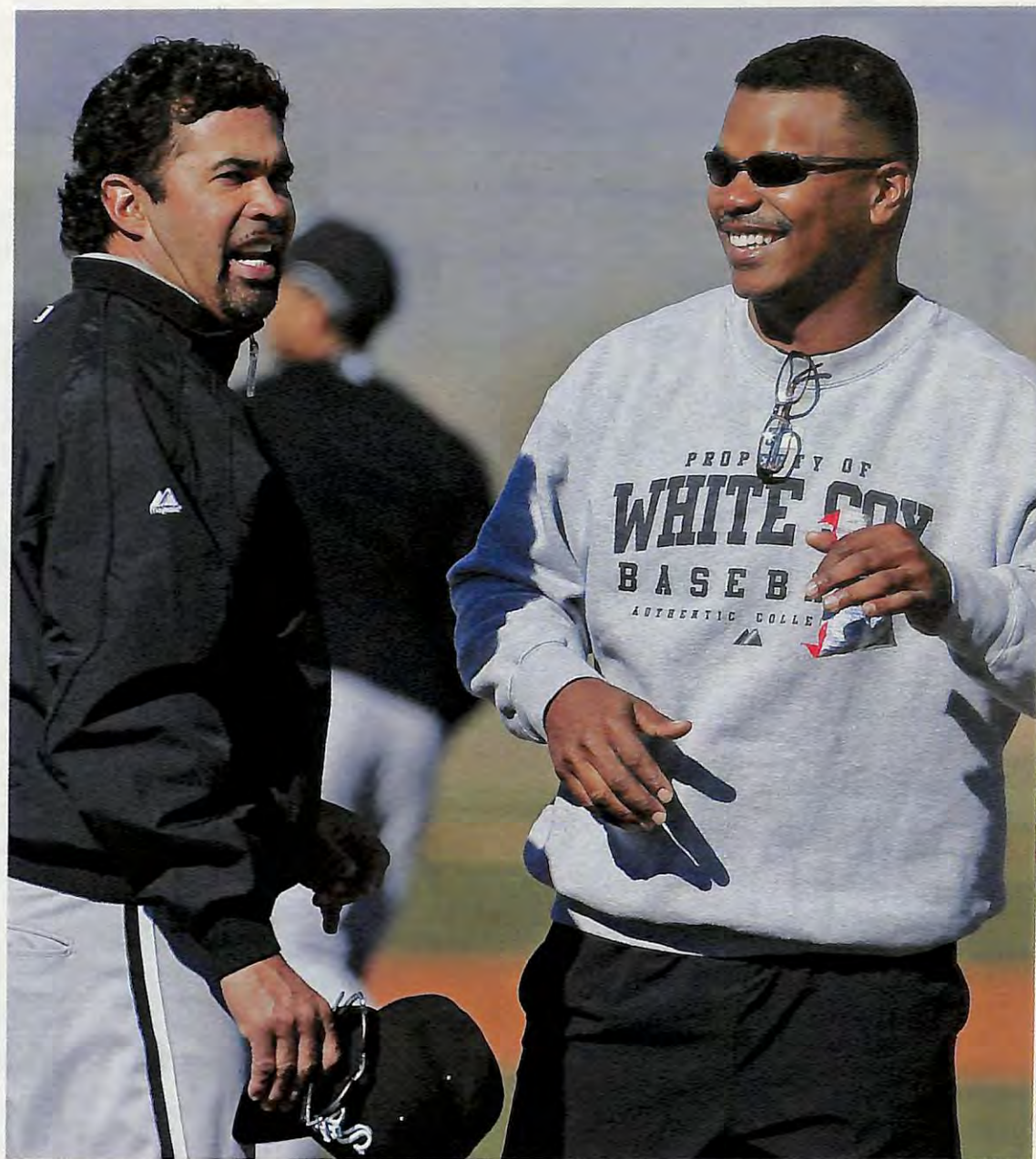
SN: You hit 28 homers in your career. Were you one of the guys who was frustrated as others around you got bigger and bigger?

GUILLEN: No, because I had a great career. I'm really happy with what I did. I'm satisfied, I completed all my hopes, all my goals in the game. Maybe if I was a different type of player, I would feel like I was cheated—(but) I'll bet you some players feel that way. I know Frank (Thomas) feels that way.

But I never feel that way. I laugh because how the hell I couldn't see (the changes in players' bodies)? My wife say every year, "Look at those players, they take care of themselves better than you do. Every year, they get bigger and stronger. You out of shape through spring training." She say, "Why you don't take care of yourself like they do? They no drink, they no do anything." Now, I get the last laugh. I'm normal, I'm healthy, I'm happy. I no have to deal with that (expletive). I no have to answer anybody's questions. ... I tell my players, "You get caught with that (expletive), don't tell me. I'm not gonna (expletive) protect you, I'm gonna throw you under the train." I don't want to be embarrassed by that situation.

SN: Your coaching staff is filled with teammates from the late 1980s, and your G.M. is also late-1980s White Sox. Those White Sox teams were pretty bad. How have players from a weak era of White Sox baseball made a good coaching staff?

GUILLEN: One thing is we love—we love with passion—the owner of the ballclub. That's the difference. We *feel* this game. We lose a game, we sit back in the room like, "Mother ... we care. There's (expletive) out there don't care. Well, (expletive), we care. Because we grew up in this organization, we grew up with the best owner in any sport—the guy with more loyalty to his employees, loyalty to his players. A lot of people always say bad stuff about him, but this is people who don't know him. Maybe they jealous. You say something negative about Jerry Reinsdorf around me, be ready to fight. Aw, yeah, be ready to fistfight because I will kick your (expletive) (expletive) if you talk about that man when you don't know him.



Guillen didn't follow the usual interview protocol for landing a job with Williams and the White Sox. Needless to say, cursing was involved.

SN: Is it true you let Kenny Williams know he'd been traded from the Sox in 1989, and you were crying?

GUILLEN: When he got traded to Detroit, we had a day off in Sarasota. I hear about it and go straight to his house. We were neighbors in the same complex in spring training. ... I told him, "Hey, you just got traded to the Detroit Tigers." I started crying because I was losing one of my friends on the team.

SN: You guys were tight?

GUILLEN: Sometimes. We got almost the same kind of hate-love (relationship) now. I never thought I was gonna work for Kenny. We're tough human beings. When he asked me to interview, I never thought I was

gonna be the manager. I don't have no experience. I told him, "Listen, you want to (expletive) talk to me just because I'm Latino, then (expletive) it, thank you, we're still friends." And he got on my (expletive) right away, he said, "Now you gonna tell me what to do?" I said, "No. But you don't waste your time, you don't waste my time. If you want to talk about baseball, then let's go." And we started talking about baseball, and that was it.

SN: Don't you think baseball should create opportunities for minorities?

GUILLEN: I don't believe in the (expletive) minority thing. You gonna hire somebody for your office or your house, you gotta hire the best guy. ... I remember

when the Marlins hired Jack McKeon, everybody come to me like, "They no interview you?" No. "Wait a minute. You a minority, you the third base coach, they no interview you?" (Expletive) it. No. They don't have to interview me. What's the reason? They don't think I'm the best guy, whatever it (expletive) was, why they have to interview me just to please other people? (Expletive) it, you don't believe what I can do, good for you, I respect that. But don't talk to me because I'm a minority. I don't believe in that (expletive). I grew up in another country. I wasn't a minority before. ... There's one funny thing about it. Jerry is white. Kenny, can I say African American? I don't know, in Venezuela it's black. And I'm Latino. Three different things, the owner, the general manager and the manager of the ballclub. It's beautiful. I'm always making fun of it with them, saying, "We're (expletive) up." But it's fun. Because we don't care what color you are, we don't care what church you go to—all we care about is please the (expletive) fans and win this (expletive).

SN: Dare I ask what the words *politically correct* mean to you?

GUILLÉN: It's the (expletive) worst thing I ever hear anybody come up with that (expletive). I don't get it. That's hypocrite (expletive). ... You can't talk about race, you can't talk about religion, you can't talk about sex preference. ... Here, you say one little thing, like I'll say what anybody else say, and they say, "No, Ozzie, you can't say that." I get in trouble. Everybody hate me.

SN: Your accent—especially when you're worked up and the words are flying—is one of the

most famous things about you. Have you ever used it as an excuse for an inflammatory statement or a miscommunication? Ever used it as a crutch?

GUILLÉN: No, I don't think so. I called one media member a name, the wrong name. But I said, "Wait a minute, I just come from the street and somebody called me that." I never thought that word (was as bad as) it was.

SN: Are you talking about Jay Mariotti? (In 2006, Guillén referred to Mariotti, who recently resigned as a columnist for the *Chicago Sun-Times* and is the manager's harshest critic, by using a homosexual slur in an interview with other reporters.)

GUILLÉN: Yes. I grew up more as a man, and I give myself more respect since that day. Because the day I called Jay that, it was off the record, no one had it on tape. ... All the sudden I see this problem was gonna create a lot of consequences, but I couldn't go out there and say I never said that. I couldn't. I could have said, "I never said that, show me where I said it." I said, "Yes, I did. I called the (expletive) that." I'm not gonna deny it.

SN: Did Sammy Sosa use his accent as a crutch before Congress, as many charge he did?

GUILLÉN: When he said he don't understand how to speak English? I don't believe him. When you spend that many years here, maybe the English is real poor to read a book. But in my case, one time I told my kids in the offseason

I got Cubs fans who are friends. I say (expletive) you. The Cubs fans, they're cocky. They've been (expletive) for a lot of years ... but they let you know they're No. 1 in town.

I'm gonna take an English class because now I gotta deal with the media more than when I was playing. ... (But then) I thought, "You know what? (Expletive) that. That's what I know. That's what I learned." ... When (Major League Baseball) sent me to the crazy guy—what is that? (Sensitivity training, as ordered by MLB following the incident with Mariotti.) This guy told me I was crazy, I need anger management. Shut the (expletive) up. You don't know, you don't know my life. You went to (expletive) Harvard, and you're gonna spend time talking to Ozzie Guillén, who got eighth grade? You should feel embarrassed. You know what? How many employees you got in your office? Let's trade (expletive) jobs for a week to see who handle it better. ... Just because I called one guy that?

SN: Have you ever feared losing your job?

GUILLÉN: I don't care. I hope I lose my job. I don't give a (expletive). I don't. I'm not gonna lose my job because of me. I might lose my job because of the players or (because) nobody like me, but every time I come here, I put the best out of myself every day to deal with my players. I told Kenny last year we were horrible. I told him, "You don't have to keep me because I'm your friend. You don't have to keep me because I'm your baby. You don't think I'm doing my job, get rid of my (expletive)." ... I guarantee (if) you wanna fire Ozzie Guillén, my cell phone will ring 30 times and they will ask me, "What do you want to do?"

SN: You'd get a ton of job offers?

GUILLÉN: Managing? Yeah. You know why? Because there's a lot of (expletive) managers that got four or five opportunities, and they're worse

managers than me, and they never do (expletive).

SN: Everybody hates A.J. Pierzynski. How about you?

GUILLÉN: So do I. ... You play against A.J., you hate him. You play with A.J., you hate him a little less.

SN: What if you manage him?

GUILLÉN: I appreciate what he does. He comes every day to play. He sometimes acts stupid. That's the way he is, I'm not gonna change his way. But A.J. show up every day to win the game, and he show up to beat you. That's all you can ask as a manager.

SN: Aren't there a lot of people around baseball who don't like you?

GUILLÉN: Yeah. (Expletive). Maybe not just people around baseball, people around *me*. I say one thing about it: You don't have to like me, and you don't have to love me, but you have to respect me because I will respect you back.

SN: What is your philosophy on throwing at batters?

GUILLÉN: My thing is, if you hit one of my batters because you're (ticked), or because you got your (expletive) kicked, or because you don't like the guy, it's on. Carlos Quentin got hit (six games in a row, last month), but I know they not want to hit him! I've been in this game long enough to know when somebody want to hit him. And I get in trouble with Major League Baseball because they say "You ever throw at a guy?" and I say yes? ... Every manager in the game knows sometimes you have to do it. And anybody who denies it, he's lying. It's (expletive). I got to protect my (expletive) players.

JUST ONE QUESTION

For Steve Stone, White Sox radio analyst
Isn't Ozzie Guillén a lot like Earl Weaver?

"I pitched in Baltimore (from 1979-81) under Earl, who would get as mad at you as anybody possibly could. But if he felt that you were the best guy on a given day to help him win, you would be in the lineup. There wasn't much of a doghouse, and the same is true with Ozzie. Of course, they also have the volatile temper thing in common and the lack of a filter thing. With that sort of personality, you're going to say some things that make your general manager cringe and your owner say, 'Eh, maybe you didn't need to say that.'"



SN: Have you gotten the credit you deserve for bringing a World Series title to Chicago after 88 years?

GUILLÉN: I don't take any credit. I give the credit to the players. Cubs fans say, "We hate your (expletive) (expletive), but thank you for bringing something to Chicago." I get that all the time. But also I get people that forgot it real (expletive) quick.

SN: If the Sox aren't in it at some point and the Cubs are, will you root for the Cubs? Do you feel their pain a little bit or not at all?

GUILLÉN: I got Cubs fans who are friends. I say (expletive) you. ... The Cubs fans, they're cocky. They've been (expletive) for a lot of years, but they're cocky. They let you know they're No. 1 in town. But I got a lot of friends with the Cubs. Lou Piniella, I love that man. That's my goal—manage that many years. The best thing that happened to (expletive) Chicago is Lou Piniella and Ozzie Guillen in the same (expletive) town. (Expletive) the boring-(expletive) guys every day. Some people have to be politically correct, some people have to be (expletive) up. That's Lou Piniella and Ozzie Guillen.

What did you miss? For outtakes from Steve Greenberg's exclusive chat with the White Sox's manager, head to sportingnews.com.

JUST ONE QUESTION



For Jay Mariotti, former *Chicago Sun-Times* columnist

Do you have any interest in mending fences with Ozzie Guillen?

"I have no interest in stooping to the man's level. I've lost track of the number of people he has slandered, slurred and smeared, and if not for the fact he has become a cartoon character who isn't taken seriously by reasonable people, he'd be an embarrassment to humankind."










Two good

Chicago's best manager?

That's Ozzie Guillen, according to none other than Ozzie Guillen.

Chicago's best team?

Let's take a closer look.

 CUBS		WHITE SOX 
 The underrated combination of second baseman Mark DeRosa and shortstop Ryan Theriot continues to be productive, and first baseman Derrek Lee and third baseman Aramis Ramirez both hit for power and average. The Cubs also have Geovany Soto, the likely N.L. rookie of the year, behind the plate.	INFIELD	None of the corner infielder/DH types (Paul Konerko, Jim Thome, Nick Swisher) is much more than a .250 hitter. Defense is a concern everywhere you look—even normally surehanded shortstop Orlando Cabrera already has more errors than he did in '07.
 Jim Edmonds' comeback has been one of the summer's best stories, but Kosuke Fukudome's post-All-Star break struggles have Wrigleyville worried. The Cubs have the edge in speed, though this group doesn't put up the big RBI numbers you'd expect on a high-scoring team. But the unit is healthy.	OUTFIELD	MVP candidate Carlos Quentin had been hitting like the Big Hurt in his prime, and he and Jermaine Dye were quite the 30-homer combo. But Quentin's wrist surgery seriously weakens an outfield that now must depend on aging Ken Griffey as an everyday player.
 With the addition of Rich Harden, this is the best starting five in the bigs. The weak link is Jason Marquis, who'll still finish with double-digit wins, and the doubts about reliever-turned-starter Ryan Dempster are yesterday's news. Sean Marshall and Chad Gaudin provide depth.	ROTATION	The maturation of youngsters Gavin Floyd and John Danks has been critical, and Mark Buehrle has been his usual reliable self. But Javier Vazquez has been inconsistent, and the loss of Jose Contreras (Achilles') leaves a void.
 The arrival of ex-Notre Dame football star Jeff Samardzija coincided with Carlos Marmol's return to form, and Neal Cotts is a valued left-handed specialist. Questions linger about Bob Howry's effectiveness and closer Kerry Wood's durability.	BULLPEN	 His saves are down, but closer Bobby Jenks quietly is having his best season. Octavio Dotel and Matt Thornton have been solid setup men, and getting back a healthy Scott Linebrink boosts this bunch even more.
 Infielders Ronny Cedeno and Mike Fontenot provide solid defensive depth and pinch-hitting options, and Reed Johnson is an above-average fourth outfielder. Even outfielder Daryle Ward has come up with key hits.	BENCH	Before Quentin's injury, the Sox had the luxury of a veteran bat on the bench each game, but not anymore. Reserve outfielders Brian Anderson and DeWayne Wise inspire little fear in the late innings.
 The Cubs are among the major league leaders in hits and home runs with men in scoring position, and the same is true in close-and-late (seventh inning and beyond) situations. Through the first five months of the season, the Cubs had 17 wins when trailing after six innings.	IN THE CLUTCH	The Sox are more all-or-nothing than their crosstown rivals—they are near the top of the pack in homers with runners on base. The Sox have been impressive in close encounters: Heading into the final full month of the season, they had rallied for 11 wins when trailing after six.

—Chris Bahr



FACE OFF

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Sins of the past have dropped Indiana basketball to one knee, but Crean is dead serious about getting the program back on track.

Stripes, but no stars

The Hoosiers have fallen far since the days of their undefeated season and national championships—even since the last days of Bob Knight. But new coach Tom Crean has the rare combination of energy and patience it will take to make **Indiana basketball matter again.**

By Mike DeCourcy

They will not let Tom Crean coach today. That is the rule for every Division I college basketball coach, none of whom is allowed to be on the court training his players during the summer. They will not let him recruit, either. This rule is specific to Crean—or, more accurately, to the person serving as head basketball coach at Indiana. He is allotted seven days during July to hit the road and scout prospects. This isn't one of those days.

Nobody, though, can restrain Tom Crean when it's time to do some interior decorating.

He is stuck on campus while, goodness knows, every other coach is out there showing love to the elite prospects, discovering the undiscovered gems or, just maybe, talking about how very long the NCAA infractions case that developed under Crean's predecessor—and still has not been resolved—is going to keep the Hoosiers down.

Crean must do something to make Indiana basketball better this morning because he has no choice but to spend his disproportionate share of the world's kinetic energy on some activity and because IU, like the

victim of a hit-and-run accident, is not going to recover on its own.

"When he gets into something, he takes ownership of it," says Michigan State coach Tom Izzo, Crean's former boss with the Spartans and still his close friend. "A lot of guys rent the space; he's going to dive in. He'll wrinkle some ironed shirts, but he'll get a lot of people on his bandwagon. Because when you do work hard, it's hard to argue against that."

So here is Crean on the mezzanine at Assembly Hall, just outside the nondescript basketball offices, rearranging the poster-size photographs that line the wall so as to better display the program's rich history. He wants as many Hoosiers greats and as many Hoosiers' champions as possible on that wall. He needs them on that wall. Today, they give him something constructive to do.

"This is very hard. It's harder than I thought it would be," Crean says. "I see our players more, but we can't go watch them work out. But that's why you've got to stay busy with the phone, diving into everything you can read, talking back and forth with the coaches. I'm trying to make sure there's no wasted time."

Photos by Jay Drowns / SN

The answer is yes. Surely you've asked the question yourself after hearing still another player from the 2007-08 Hoosiers was departing the program. As the coach who took Marquette from faded power to the 2003 Final Four, who made the Golden Eagles an instant success upon moving to the Big East, who was the most powerful person in his athletic department—would Crean have taken the Indiana job if he had known things would get this bad?

"I think I would have," he says. "There's never been a time when I laid there in the morning and said, 'Man, I don't want to do this today.' Now, I've laid there and thought, 'What's coming up today?' There's been a lot of things I wouldn't have wished on anybody to have to deal with."

IU staggered out of the 2008 NCAA Tournament with an embarrassing first-round loss. That occurred weeks after coach Kelvin Sampson had resigned. Indiana and the NCAA alleged he participated in recruiting phone calls that violated sanctions imposed against him for a similar case at Oklahoma.

Since then, eight players with eligibility remaining have departed, leaving the program without a single player recruited to Indiana on scholarship. Two left, as planned, for the NBA. Four were permanently dismissed. Two chose to transfer, including center Eli Holman, who left for Detroit. On his way out, Holman staged the most violent scene in the history of transfers, shouting at Crean while they were in the coach's tiny office along with Crean's wife, Joani, and strength coach Jeff Watkinson and then flinging a potted plant several feet, where it smashed off the cubicle of longtime administrative assistant B.J. McElroy.

Minus the flying greenery, it has been that kind of battle daily since Crean took the job. In June, he attended the program's NCAA hearing in Seattle, even though he had no connection to what was being alleged, because his presence made it clear Indiana was moving forward. In late June, after the NCAA had tacked on a charge that the IU administration failed to monitor the basketball program, athletic director Rick Greenspan announced his resignation. Throughout July, Crean's

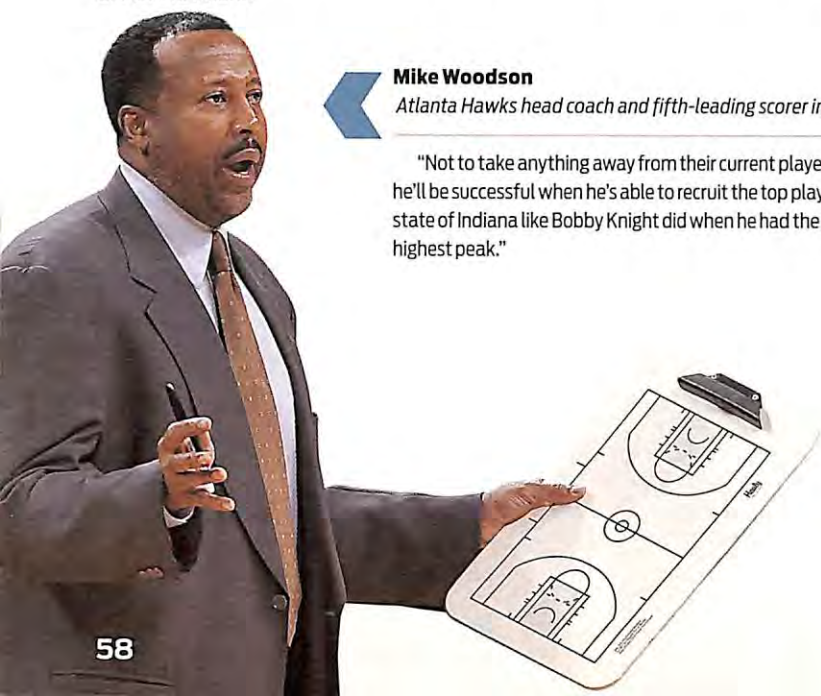


Crean is a tireless worker—even in the dog days of summer, even when he can't be with his players on the court.

Crean won't be measured by wins and losses—for now

Tom Crean's task is so daunting, even alumni are willing to give him a pass in terms of wins and losses. "It's a necessary pass," says Dane Fife, who played for the Hoosiers from 1998-2002. "The state of the program is not where it needs to be. In due time, it will happen."

In the short term, former players expect immediate improvement in the character of the players. That's the consensus measure of success, at least early on, for Crean. As former IU guard Todd Leary puts it, he rooted for last year's Hoosiers only because they wore Crimson and Cream. What do others think success will look like for Crean? *Sporting News* asked six ex-Hoosiers.



Mike Woodson

Atlanta Hawks head coach and fifth-leading scorer in IU history

"Not to take anything away from their current players, but I think he'll be successful when he's able to recruit the top players from the state of Indiana like Bobby Knight did when he had the program at its highest peak."

Tom Abernethy

Member of the 1976 undefeated national champion team

"I don't have to gauge wins and losses and all that stuff. He's shown a lot of willingness to work hard and bring in good kids to represent the university. That is first and foremost in my mind. I'm trusting that as he does this he'll have his share of wins and championships. I don't think I'd have a timetable that you have to do this or that in a certain time. I'm not expecting great things from a wins and losses standpoint early."

Scott May

Member of the 1976 title team and player of the year that season

"I think he'll be successful when he's at a timeout and he looks behind the players' bench in the huddle and sees how many of his former players are watching him play. I've had two Hall of Fame coaches tell me that—Bob Knight and Dean Smith."

Dane Fife

IPFW head coach, member of the 2002 NCAA runner-up team

"Everyone fully understands that Coach Crean doesn't have the resources in terms of manpower. He has a tough, difficult job ahead of him. But he has a system that is unbelievable. It's almost foolproof. Once you get your players, it's a machine. It's so strong, it's just moving, moving, moving. Very few coaches have that ability."

Ted Kitchel

All-American and member of the 1981 national title team

"Everyone is excited about what Tom is going to do. My excitement will have nothing to do with his record over the next two or three years. It will have to do with the type of people he's recruiting, that they're doing the things they should be doing as a student-athlete. You can do all that and still compete at a very high level on the basketball court."

Todd Leary

Member of the 1992 Final Four team, color analyst for IU Radio Network

"I want (players who will do) the right thing, not a bunch of kids that are getting in trouble every other week. You didn't want to root for them. ... I can't imagine there are going to be too high of expectations this year or even next year. Beyond that, the expectations will rise dramatically and quickly. But I don't expect them to lay down. I think their goal ought to be to finish .500 in the Big Ten."

— Matt Crossman

recruiting days were limited because of sanctions Indiana self-imposed—even though he was living clean at Marquette when the alleged violations occurred. In late August, when it appeared his roster was set, after he and his staff had finalized a list of seven new recruits, he learned fifth-year senior Kyle Taber, a former walk-on who had inherited a leadership position, would be out 10 weeks recovering from a knee injury.

"I look at that job as an enormous challenge, even beyond his wildest dreams," says Marquette deputy athletic director Mike Broeker. "There's no way they could have accurately portrayed to him the reality of the situation. But that enormous challenge will drive him every single day."

It wasn't obvious at the time, but Crean married into a sort of first family of American coaching. Football coaching. Joani's father, Jack Harbaugh, was a respected coach with stops as an assistant at Pitt and Michigan and later as the head coach at Western Kentucky, where he won a Division I-AA championship. Her brother Jim had a 14-year NFL playing career and now is the head coach at Stanford. Her brother John was an assistant with the Philadelphia Eagles for 10 seasons before getting his head coaching break this year with the Baltimore Ravens.

Throughout John's decade with the Eagles, Crean agitated about attending camp and getting a dawn-to-dusk education in how an NFL team prepares for a season. But it wasn't John's team. This year, Crean was going to get his big chance with the Ravens, but the transition to Indiana is too involved to allow him the freedom. Maybe next summer.



Crean will battle writer's cramp and ink stains if it means leaving a few more people with a positive impression of Indiana basketball.

"We always say he's a football coach disguised as a basketball coach," John says. "He's got so much energy, he's tough, and his practices resemble full-contact football workouts. That's really his personality. He loves looking at our notebooks and getting football terminology for his basketball plays. Give him a few words and he'll be happy."

The bookshelves in Crean's office are crowded with books on all types of coaches, all kinds of leaders.

"I don't think I've been around a coach who spreads himself that wide trying to gain knowledge," says Jeff Nix, a former New York Knicks scouting director and close friend of Crean's. Having accomplished coaches in the family brings that level of resource closer to home.

"It's not like he's got a lot of time for foolishness," John Harbaugh says. "There's always stuff turning over in his mind. He'll ask questions, challenging you, he wants to know what you're thinking."

It is lunchtime, which on this day in Tom Crean's world is 2:30 p.m. Maybe he was hungry a couple of hours ago, maybe not. But he was busy.

So everyone eats now. But as Joani starts her SUV to get the air conditioning running, Ray and Miriam Schlabach of Sarasota, Fla., approach Tom tentatively in the parking lot at Assembly Hall.

They explain they were in northern Indiana visiting family and drove out of their way to make a pilgrimage to Assembly Hall.

He takes them up to the basketball offices and has them wait near Flower Pot Alley. Crean emerges a few minutes later with IU shirts for the Schlabachs and a cap for their young daughter, which Crean adjusts so it will fit on her head. "That's the stuff that blows you away about the place," Crean says.

This is the type of program he was born to coach.

"There are very few places like IU, Carolina, Kansas—that have banners hanging multiple times," Nix says.

And those programs have constituencies beyond the borders of campus or town. Crean, with persuasive powers that make him as much a campaigning politician as a sideline coach, can unleash the power contained in that devotion by making each fan, each former player, each student on campus feel Crean is personally invested in them. It's one reason so many Marquette fans were personally affronted by his decision to leave after nine years at the school.

The first phone call Crean made after accepting the job? To former Hoosiers star Ted Kitchel, still an ardent Bob Knight supporter, who was outspoken in his distrust of and distaste for Sampson. In late August, Kitchel and Crean finally had the chance to meet at a reunion the coach had arranged for former IU players at a resort in French Lick, Ind. It became the largest gathering of former Hoosiers ever, with more than 180 in attendance.

"We need the former players to be around, to be telling our players what it means to be a part of this," Crean says. "Once this uncertainty gets out of everybody's system—and I understand that's a part of it, I live it every day ...

"There's been so many people playing the victim role. I always want to make sure I'm catching myself not doing that, or whining. Because I'm proud to be here. I'm proud to show it off."

From one rebuilder to another ...



Cronin preaches persistence, patience and, yeah, some occasional pointing to get a struggling program off the ground.

Mick Cronin took over as Cincinnati's head coach in 2006, and he began his first season with one scholarship player remaining from the previous year—a situation similar to the one Tom Crean faces at Indiana. Cincinnati's recruiting had been crippled by uncertainty over Bob Huggins' future and, after he was forced out, about who would replace him. Cronin learned a few things while building a team from what he calls a "death penalty situation" and has a few pointers for Crean:

1. Pack plenty of patience. For guys who've been successful, this is a new challenge. It's a process that's long term, not overnight. You sit there and say, "I know it's going to be tough," but until you go through it when you've never lost, it's tougher than you think. It's not in your DNA. You just think "I'll watch more film, we'll do a better job coaching, we'll work and we'll still win."

2. Stay focused on the future. It's like building a house. It's not going to look right until it's finished, but laying the foundation is most important. It's not going to be done until it's done, no matter how much you want it to be. If you try to speed up the process, you're going to miss something. Staying focused on the future can keep you positive in the beginning.

3. Be prepared to stay the course. A lot of people are going to say, "We know how tough it's going to be. It's going to take four or five years." After a year, people want results. For a lot of your constituency, they're going to forget they said that. You can't let it bother you. I used to tell people, "I wish I could hit the fast-forward button. I wish this were a movie and I could skip to Scene 12." It's not a movie. You've got to go through it.

4. Know it's going to be fragile early on. One injury can really hurt you. You feel the effects of misfortune a lot more.

5. Never waver in your beliefs. You can't beat yourself up. You can't go home and say, "If I'd done this ..." Some nights, your team is going to get overwhelmed, and there's nothing you can do about it. You've got to be steadfast in what you know is right. In recruiting, you've got to make sure you're taking the kind of players you want to coach. You're better off in Year 3 and 4 having the program you want than worrying about Years 1 and 2 because there's not much you can do about those, anyway.

—As told to Mike DeCourcy

NFL HALL OF FAMERS' TURN

Don't go to sleep on the Eagles

Sure, the Eagles were the only NFC East team not to make the playoffs last year, but Andy Reid is still their head coach and Donovan McNabb is back with a smile.

I'll admit, I'm a bit surprised McNabb is still with the Eagles considering all the speculation. That said, he is now two years removed from knee surgery, and that's when most players fully regain their form. When I saw him recently, he seemed relaxed, upbeat, positive.

Y.A. Tittle once told me that there are three stages a quarterback goes through. First, you join the team and everybody is excited about you. Then, four or five years down the road, people get accustomed to you and start looking for "the next guy." And, finally, if you're lucky enough to hang around, you become the old sentimental favorite and everybody starts rooting for you again.

I'm not sure McNabb is in that "old" stage yet, but if you play long enough in one city, you do have ups and downs. And McNabb and the Eagles are primed for an "up" season.

I do worry about their wide receivers. McNabb lobbied for more playmakers, yet the Eagles pretty much stood pat. They have a collection of solid receivers but no great one. Rookie DeSean Jackson looks promising, but is he big enough to play every down?

Maybe this is the year tight end L.J. Smith breaks out and sets up everybody else, like Tony Gonzalez and Antonio Gates do. Smith is capable of great things, but for some



The NFC East is tough, but don't be surprised if McNabb leads the Eagles to a division title.

reason—perhaps injuries—he hasn't achieved greatness. Clearly, the Eagles think he's on the cusp—they used the franchise tag to make sure they didn't lose him this offseason.

In the end, Brian Westbrook is the guy who makes everything go. He sets the table with his running and receiving. He is the guy who keeps defensive coordinators up at night.

Defensively, Philly was good last year, but this year's version will be better. Coordinator Jim Johnson has one objective each week: Put the opposing quarterback on his back. Under Johnson, the Eagles generally have excelled at producing turnovers, but in 2007 they were last in the NFL in takeaways (19) and tied for last in interceptions (11). Expect that to change this year because of the addition of Asante Samuel, who had 16 interceptions over the past two seasons.

This is a good, balanced team. I expect the Eagles to contend for a division title in the NFC East, the toughest division in football.

Pro Football Hall of Fame quarterback Troy Aikman is a regular columnist for Sporting News and host of the Troy Aikman Show on Sporting News Radio.

What separates the great QBs is how they handle pressure

No matter where you play or which team you play for, every quarterback feels pressure—more so than any other position in sports. A lot of guys are talented enough but not mentally tough enough. What separates the great ones is how they handle it.

Five high-profile QBs who will face different types of pressure this season:

► Tony Romo, Cowboys: Expectations.

The spotlight is always brighter in Dallas, the expectations always higher. Losing the past couple of years in the playoffs adds to that pressure. But Tony can't worry about the playoffs until January. He has to get his team focused every week and get to the playoffs first. A good team can lose its focus. It happened to us in Denver. We'd been to the Super Bowl three out of four years and thought we were automatically a playoff team. Well, in 1990, we didn't have that focus, that edge. We lost four of our first six and finished 5-11.



Every quarterback is under scrutiny, but the spotlight that follows Romo is brighter than most.

► Aaron Rodgers, Packers: Following a legend.

Aaron has been preparing for this for years, knowing Brett Favre could retire at any moment. The biggest advantage Aaron has is he's stepping into a really good football team. Aaron has a lot of upside

because of the team around him, but there also is a big downside should the team not achieve what it did with Brett. Fans and teammates expect Aaron to get them back to where they were—the NFC championship game—or beyond.

► Vince Young, Titans: Reading defenses.

Learning to read defenses is directly related to gaining experience. Vince is in his third year, so now is the time we should see a big jump. He has a new coordinator—Mike Heimerdinger—and Vince will need time to get comfortable with the new terminology and new plays. But there is only so much a coach can do. As a quarterback, you have to experience things on the field and learn to execute under fire.

► Philip Rivers, Chargers: Coming off a major injury.

He really elevated himself in his teammates' eyes and the public's eyes with his playoff run last year and playing through the torn ACL. He gritted his teeth and made big throws. He put his body on the line and made plays. Teammates now know his confidence is genuine, and that rubs off on everybody.

► Ben Roethlisberger, Steelers. Dealing with the physical toll.

He got banged up a lot the past couple years—on the field (93 sacks) and off (motorcycle wreck, appendectomy). But he's just a big, tough, physical guy. I see myself in him a bit. He's just fearless and has the body to take a pounding. That wears on defenses, too. They know they can beat the hell out of him and he's going to bounce right back up.

Pro Football Hall of Fame quarterback John Elway is a regular columnist for Sporting News.



John Elway

Every NFL game, every Sunday.

Favre may be old, but he and the Jets can get better

By Albert Breer

abreer@sportingnews.com

Brett Favre thought he overthrew Jerricho Cotchery. Cotchery, following the advice of his coaches to "just run," darted out of a double move to the corner and went top speed at the ball.

The result was a 56-yard touchdown pass, the 443rd of Favre's illustrious career and his first in a uniform other than the Packers' green and gold. The throw illustrates just how much he changes the Jets' offense.

"You saw the pass he had down to Jerricho for the touchdown, things like that, it opens up a lot more things that maybe we didn't do in the past," says Jets tight end Chris Baker. "And the other thing is he's so unpredictable, so you never know where the ball's going to go."

Some things Favre once had—namely, his ability to make like Houdini with his legs—are gone. But the howitzer arm is still intact, and the penchant for the creative is, too.

The Jets' offense is now infinitely tougher to defend. Favre forces defenders to stick with a play until the whistle and cover the entire field—sideline to sideline, end to end—an ability Chad Pennington, for all his strengths, lacked.

"With Brett, you're not really sure one way or the other," says Dolphins coach Tony Sparano, whose team lost to Favre in Week 1. "I mean, he's back there and he's scrambling and he's doing those things. You don't know whether or not he's going to take off and run it, and you don't know whether or not he's going to throw it."

Now, the problem: Favre's Jets teammates must learn to play in a high-wire environment. It doesn't happen overnight or even with a month of practices. Favre needs regular-season snaps to develop the kind of timing and cohesiveness he had with his receivers in Green Bay.

Case in point: On his sixth play as a Jet, facing third-and-13, Favre took a five-step drop and bombed one down the sideline to what he thought would



Favre's strong arm and resourcefulness give the Jets a new level of options on offense. Now his teammates must adjust to all the things their new quarterback can do.

be a wide-open Laveranues Coles. Only problem was Coles had broken off his route, running a comeback to the sideline, and watched as the ball sailed over his head.

You can try to clean up those things in practice, but it takes going through it in game action to learn.

"There's no substitute for it," Favre says. "I don't know if (game action) accelerates or decelerates it, but it gives you something to learn from. It gives us a basis of what we want to learn from."

And that goes for the play-calling, too. The real test for what will work, or won't work, with Favre in the Jets' system is just beginning.

The bigger the database offensive coordinator Brian Schottenheimer has, the better.

"Really, in some ways, I'm putting him in an awkward spot, too, because he wants to be productive, you want to be able to scheme," Favre says. "He's been great, asking me what I'm comfortable with. But there's no substitute for playing and getting a feel for where you are."

Which is to say Favre and the Jets only figure to get better.

Scouting Report: Patriots QB Matt Cassel

With Patriots starter Tom Brady suffering a knee injury in Week 1, the spotlight now shines brightly on his backup, Matt Cassel. RealScouts, *Sporting News'* exclusive team of NFL scouts, filed a report on Cassel:

Strengths: A well-built athlete with quick feet. Throws with velocity and accuracy on short and intermediate passes. Shows poise under pressure and has a good feel inside the pocket. Makes good use of his quickness and instincts when plays break down. Shows good touch and can make plays while scrambling.

Weaknesses: Has almost no game experience, in college or the NFL. Lacks great arm strength and must improve his technique. Downfield passes float at times. Must improve his ability to locate secondary targets. Tends to lock on to a target and force passes into traffic.

Bottom line: Cassel is no Brady, but no one is. Cassel has intangibles like Brady but lacks the arm and the field vision. That poses a bit of a problem because the Patriots' passing attack is predicated on presnap reads where receivers and the quarterback must react to coverages

the same way and adjust routes accordingly.

That takes time and reps. If Bill Belichick and coordinator Josh McDaniels stick with the system, there will be growing pains.

But if they simplify or streamline the playbook to include fewer of those reads and cut back on the spread formations with no backfield blockers, the offense will be less effective.

For previews and picks from Real Scouts, go to their blog at realscouts.com.



Cassel hasn't had much reason to knock the rust off until now. He backed up Carson Palmer and Matt Leinart at USC and has been under Brady's cape with the Patriots.

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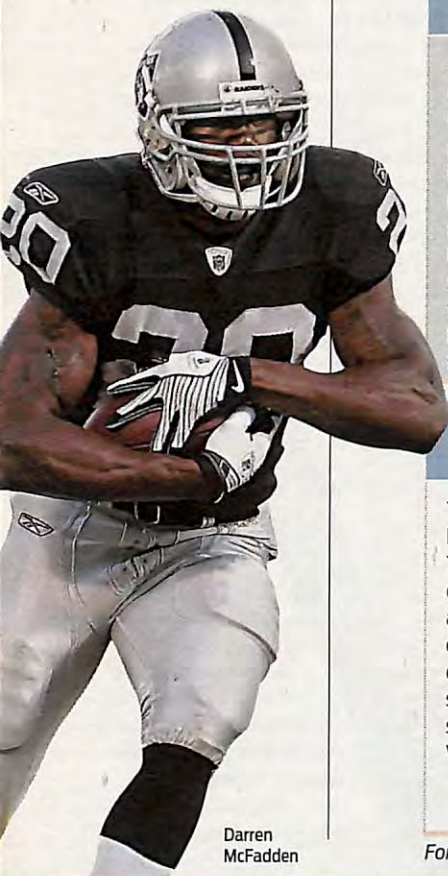


ONLY
— ON —





Brian Baldinger



Darren McFadden

A starring lineup: Nine smash-hit rookie backs

This is a new era for running backs in the NFL. As more college programs go to spread offenses, the traditional every-down power backs are harder to find. Instead, they are built more for speed, and NFL teams are looking at them as impact players in two-back systems. This season has brought an outstanding rookie class, led by these early-impact backs:

Darren McFadden, Raiders (fourth overall pick)	Jonathan Stewart, Panthers (13th)	Felix Jones, Cowboys (22nd)	Rashard Mendenhall, Steelers (23rd)	
An upbeat, happy kid, his energy will be infectious in Oakland. He also has speed, but there should be concerns about his running style. He doesn't make people miss and has trouble starting and stopping. He is strong, but the way he runs, taking hits—he isn't built to last for a long time.	He is impressive and will be effective splitting carries with DeAngelo Williams. As long as his toe is good to go, Stewart will be a huge part of the Panthers' return to a strong running game.	How fluid is this kid? You could put your morning cup of coffee on his head when he's running and it wouldn't fall off. He's a natural runner who knows how to make people miss. It wouldn't be surprising if he ended up being the best in this class.	Drafting Mendenhall is proof they want to be the same old Steelers, pounding the football and winning games up front. He's a great complement to Willie Parker.	
Chris Johnson, Titans (24th)	Matt Forte, Bears (44th)	Ray Rice, Ravens (55th)	Kevin Smith, Lions (64th)	Steve Slaton, Texans (89th)
The speediest in this class, he isn't so easy to tackle. The Titans will pound it often with LenDale White, and Johnson is the ideal change-of-pace guy they can use anywhere, in many situations—especially with screen passes—to help Vince Young.	His ability to catch the ball has the Bears seeing him as a dual threat. The concern, though, is the reworked offensive line. The plan is in place to use Forte often, and with the Bears' quarterback questions, they better be able to run the ball. The hope is Forte is a lot more like Neal Anderson than Cedric Benson.	His quickness has been an eye-opener. He has a chance to get a lot of carries early with Willis McGahee hurting and Baltimore needing to run often to help its inexperienced quarterbacks. The Ravens have had some issues at offensive tackle, but they have a good interior line and Le'Ron McClain is a promising young fullback.	Like many rookie backs, he has trouble pass blocking. As a runner, he is tall and hard to bring down. The Lions are trying to establish an identity as a physical offense and need Smith to get a lot of touches.	He is in the right place to get a chance because Houston can't seem to keep its other backs healthy. Slaton is the right type of runner for Alex Gibbs' zone-blocking scheme and has the potential to be more than just a third-down back.



Matt Forte

Matt Forte

Former NFL player Brian Baldinger is a regular contributor to *Sporting News*, *Sporting News Today* and *Sporting News Radio*.

What it's like ...

... to tackle Steelers RB Willie Parker

By Ray Lewis

You've got to catch him first. When I play against Willie, I have to play angles. Willie is fast. It's kind of hard to get a good hit on him. I've caught him a couple of times, but it was when he was bottled in. Willie's one of those guys you appreciate playing against because he plays the game on the field.

Afterward, he leaves it on the field. It's done. Great talent. I love to watch him play football, too, because he plays it with a chip on his shoulder. But I'm not going to give him too much credit because we still have to play them twice a year.

... to be tackled by Ravens LB Ray Lewis

By Willie Parker

He's aggressive, man. You know what he's going to bring every play, and that's to try to bring that *pain* every play. So therefore I got to get away from that dude. Before he can be talking about himself, I'd be looking to see where he is. But I would get up with a smile, I wouldn't say he hurt me. It was more gratification on my part because I really look up to that dude. I've been looking up to him for a long time.

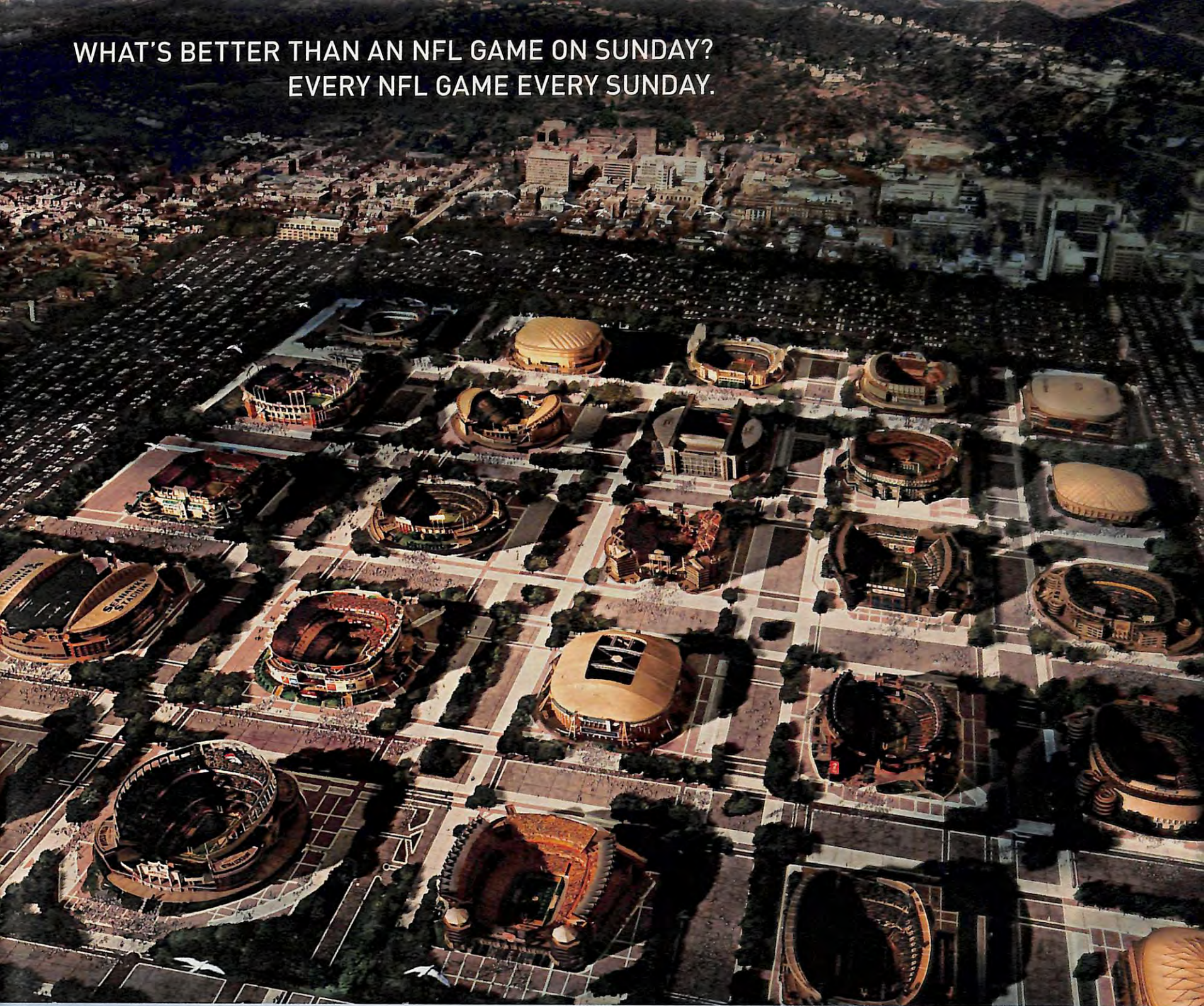
The first time he hit me, he showed me a lot of love, actually. He said, "Parker, Parker, not today." It surprised me. I expected something different because I hadn't gained any respect in the league yet, so I definitely expected something different.

Parker's Steelers won the one game in which he played against the Ravens last year, but Lewis' crew held him to 42 yards in 23 carries.



MCCOBB: GREG TROT / GETTY IMAGES; FORTÉ: SCOTT BOEHM / GETTY IMAGES; PARKER: LENS: LUC LECLEZ / US PRESSWIRE

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COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Predicting the future isn't easy, even for the experts

In the college basketball biz, August ought to be a month to lounge on a beach in Aruba. But, *nooooo*. Somebody's got to do the prognosticating for the *Sporting News* college basketball yearbook (on newsstands October 7). Mike DeCourcy discovered it's harder than it looks. There were four particularly tough calls:

1 The last All-American.

Choosing four guys was as easy as counting to four. Identifying a fifth required faith. Gonzaga's Austin Daye has outrageous talent on offense but was struggling against physical play even before he got hurt this summer. If he can take a hit, he'll be a smash.

2 The Big East pecking order.

Four teams (Louisville, UConn, Pitt and Notre Dame) could win the league. Eight have a chance to end up in the top four. Somebody will be insulted, but they're all NCAA-bound.

3 Ranking Davidson.

The Wildcats wound up in last season's Elite Eight but lost an essential starter, guard Jason Richards. They deserve to be ranked, but others might be more generous.

4 Wading through the Tennessee hype.

Others are seeing the Vols' great coach surrounded by terrific recruits and star forward Tyler Smith. Some of us see a great coach who lost five of his top eight scorers and is hip-deep in rookies. Top 10? Really?

Q&A with Lute Olson



Lute Olson will celebrate his 74th birthday this month—and he'll celebrate it as the head coach of the Arizona Wildcats. After 24 years at the school, he missed last season on a leave of absence. If his Wildcats win 20 games this season, Olson will hit 800 career victories—five NCAA Division I men's coaches have reached the milestone. He spoke with *Sporting News*' Mike DeCourcy about the events of the past year and the future for Arizona.

SN: Can you talk about what caused you to step away?

OLSON: It was just a case of anxiety. It was a situation where you don't feel like you're yourself, in terms of being able to do the things that need to be done with a group of young men. By February, that was all over and done with.

SN: How hard was it to be away?

OLSON: It was very difficult. I watched all the games on TV, but that's not the

same. You see things, and you'd like to say, "This guy really needs to spend a lot of time on this." And you're not in that mix. So it's in somebody else's hands.

SN: Interim coach Kevin O'Neill played a slower style because he didn't feel he could play more than five or six of the guys on the roster. You weren't comfortable with the slower, halfcourt approach.

OLSON: I recruited all the kids, and they were here to play our style of play. I thought they did a great job of adjusting.

I also knew that Nic (Wise) loves to push the ball, as did Jerryd (Bayless), and Chase (Budinger) loves to run the floor. When they get the ball in open-court situations, I think they're at their best. We try to run on everything except when the official has to handle the ball. That was not the philosophy.

SN: Can you get back to playing fast with the group you have?

OLSON: Because of guys playing so many minutes, Kevin had them pick up defensively at the top of the circle, and we'll extend that out because we feel like we have good quickness out front. We have enough depth at guard with that kind of quickness that we can put good pressure on.

SN: Top guard prospect Brandon Jennings had trouble getting eligible at Arizona and decided to sign a pro contract in Italy. Was that a casualty of the transition last season?



OLSON: No. That problem didn't have anything to do with us. We were really fortunate in that once that decision was imminent, we were able to pick up a kid by the name of Garland Judkins out of Texas, who is (6-4) and quick and a great attitude kid.

SN: After Jennings left, you were quoted as saying you would not recruit another "one-and-done" player. But how do you know? Couldn't Chase Budinger have been one of those players?

OLSON: We won't want anyone that it's apparent that's what he's going to do, and that the pros are going to pick him.

In Chase's case, when we talked I told him I thought we could have him ready for the league in two years. When he tested the waters this last year, I said that was great. You'll find out if you're ready, and if not you'll find out what you need to do to be ready in a year. He came back, and he's the happiest kid in the world to be back.

5-ON-5 Five March Madness heroes take on five hot topics

	I'd love to play for ...	Can't beat the tournament's ____ weekend	The Final Four in a word	Best player I ever guarded	____ dominated the Final Four like no one I've seen
 Bryce Drew, Valparaiso G	Scott Drew, Baylor	First	Exciting	Baron Davis	Christian Laettner, Duke
 Corey Brewer, Florida F	Bruce Pearl, Tennessee	Third	Amazing	Francisco Garcia	Teammate Joakim Noah
 Jeff Sheppard, Kentucky G	Billy Donovan, Florida	Third	Memories	Michael Jordan	Kentucky
 Keith Smart, Indiana G	Roy Williams, North Carolina	First	Amazing	Gary Grant	Hakeem Olajuwon, Houston
 Joakim Noah, Florida F/C	Anthony Grant, Virginia Commonwealth	Third	Priceless	Lenny Cooke	Teammate Lee Humphrey

Get your program here! (You're going to need it)



Rick Barry

As a basketball player at the University of Miami back in the 1960s, I sold programs at home football games to make a few extra bucks. I distinctly remember my "pitch" to potential customers: "Hey, get your programs here. You can't tell the players without your program." This same sales pitch may be needed for NBA games this year—a flurry of offseason player movement, through trades and free agency, has given numerous teams a new look. The biggest moves so far:

1. Ron Artest to the Rockets. This may be the biggest gamble of the offseason, but if the "bad boy" can be a good boy, the Rockets just improved exponentially and have a shot at The Finals. (The addition of that Brent Barry kid doesn't hurt, either.)

2. Jermaine O'Neal to the Raptors. O'Neal joins Olympic gold medalist Chris Bosh to form a formidable front line for the Raptors. With Jose Calderon as the full-time point guard, the Raptors can contend in the Eastern Conference.

3. Marcus Camby to the Clippers. Camby can't be happy that the Nuggets let him go for virtually nothing. Watch out for last season's leading shot blocker to explode on the L.A. scene.

4. Baron Davis to the Clippers. Another nice pickup for the Clips, though committing \$65 million

to a player with durability issues is a concern—I question whether it will pay off for owner Donald Sterling and coach Mike Dunleavy, my old Rockets teammate. Should Davis stay healthy, though, he can provide leadership and consistency.

5. Elton Brand to the 76ers. Brand's decision to leave the Clippers came as a bit of a surprise. Brand and Davis are buddies, and certainly Brand could see that the team had a chance to improve with Davis on board. I guess money does talk (in this case, \$82 million) because no doubt the Philadelphia lifestyle didn't sell him on the move. Perhaps the opportunity to play in the less competitive East had something to do with it.

Some teams dug into their wallets and re-signed major talent. Gilbert Arenas maintained residence in the nation's capital, Luol Deng stayed in Chicago, Josh Smith remained with Atlanta, Monta Ellis re-signed with the Warriors, and the Sixers kept Andre Iguodala. In these cities, you won't need a new program. Use your money for popcorn and a drink.

Rick Barry, a 12-time All-Star and member of the Basketball Hall of Fame, is a regular contributor to Sporting News.

Good teams sometimes have to take a risk to become great. The Rockets are hoping that trading for volatile forward Ron Artest is just the right move.

Competing against the big boys

When the money is equal, reputation, talented teammates and location are the keys to signing big-name free agents. That means it's going to be tough for the Kings to rank high on free agents' lists in 2010.

- 1. Detroit.** Few are better than Pistons G.M. Joe Dumars.
- 2. San Antonio.** OK, maybe Gregg Popovich and R.C. Buford are better.
- 3. Miami.** Everyone loves South Beach. The team hopes D-Wade does, too.
- 4. Phoenix.** NBA types love golf. And Phoenix has plenty of golf.
- 5. Cleveland.** If LeBron stays put, teammates will flock to Lake Erie.
- 6. New Jersey.** The move to Brooklyn makes the Nets more attractive.
- 7. Houston.** If T-Mac opts out, the payroll drops to \$25 million.
- 8. Portland.** The Blazers are oozing young talent.
- 9. Dallas.** Mark Cuban, owner. Every player likes to hear that.
- 10. Sacramento.** Plenty of cash and a heck of a fan base.

—Sean Deveney

A free-agent free-for-all is coming

One lesson of the past few NBA summers is that cap space cures all. And with a smorgasbord of free agents hitting the market in that Shangri-La NBA execs know as the summer of 2010, everyone's scrambling to create cap space. Count the Kings in that group. As co-owner Gavin Maloof says, "All I know is that money is power. And we'll have money."

You likely know the list of expected free agents—among them are LeBron James, Dwyane Wade, Chris Bosh, Dirk Nowitzki, Tracy McGrady and Amare Stoudemire. But here's the secret about the summer of '10: Many teams will have cap space. A look at league payrolls shows that about 20 clubs are good bets to have enough money to make a

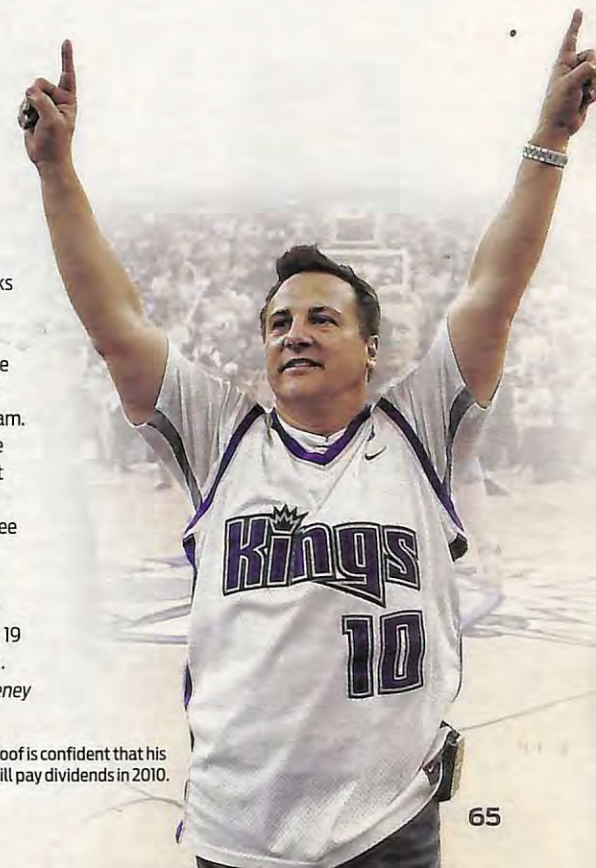
max-contract offer (and no, the Knicks are not one of them ... yet).

Which is why Maloof knows it will take more than just money to lure free agents. It'll take a sales pitch. "I think what we can offer is a good young team. We'll have our current players and the guys we add in the draft over the next two years," Maloof says. "We'll be on the way up. If we can then add that free agent, we'll really be on the way up."

Indeed, the Kings are young, talented and on their way up. It's a good pitch. But there will be about 19 teams making pitches of their own.

—Sean Deveney

Kings co-owner Gavin Maloof is confident that his team's salary cap space will pay dividends in 2010.



COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Legends of the Fall

Sporting News has joined forces with the Legends Football Coaches Association, whose members share a unique perspective throughout the season. In this edition, we asked the coaches a question on a topic of particular interest to them this season.



Graham Harrell



R.C. Slocum
Texas A&M



Bill Mallory
Indiana



Don James
Washington



Dick MacPherson
Syracuse

Q: *If you could take one QB from the Big 12 (not from A&M), who would it be and why?*

A: My choice would be Graham Harrell from Texas Tech. He has great passing skills and has good mobility. He was a great player in high school in the spread offense and has taken that experience into Tech's spread offense. He has a lot of experience in that style of offense. He is tough and a great leader.

Why is it so difficult to win consistently at a school that is wildly successful and popular in another sport?

When I was at Indiana, we were in a good situation where basketball had been so dominant and football had its moments. Over a span of time, we had success. In a situation like Indiana, I feel strongly you can win here. But some things had to be done. There has to be a belief there. That wasn't a problem with Terry Hoepfner, and now we have Bill Lynch, who coached for me and I think the world of. But there also has to be commitment (from the school). Are you going to do the things to make it work? We're on and off here with that.

How did you know Missouri's Gary Pinkel was going to be a good head coach?

I had an advantage when I went to Kent State. Gary was a sophomore. When I got there and talked to the outgoing coach, he said, "I got six guys who you need to get rid of and six that can really play." Gary was on the list of guys who could play. Jack Lambert, too. And Nick Saban. So I enjoyed coaching (Pinkel), and then I got him as a grad assistant out there and really liked him as a coach. I watched him grow as a coach and a recruiter. He's just so well-organized. He gets everything down in writing. You know exactly what's expected of you. He hasn't lost anybody off his staff, and that's the incredible thing.

Is it more difficult to make a winner out of a losing team in college football or the NFL?

It's more difficult to make a winner out of a team in college than it is in pro ball. In college football, there's much more of a difference between bottom teams and top teams. In the NFL, teams are much more equal. But when you're taking over a losing program, be it in college ball or NFL ball, you've got problems. If you notice (programs) that keep winning, if the head coach moves on, an assistant takes over because everything is already in place. It's all people. Coaching is not as important as the people you have playing for you.



LaVell Edwards
BYU



George Welsh
Virginia



John Cooper
Ohio State



Don Nehlen
West Virginia

Q: *Should what happened to Hawaii in last year's Sugar Bowl impact BYU's chances of playing in the BCS?*

A: There have been blowouts that have happened in the national championship game. Unless non-BCS teams are judged by a different standard, I would hope not.

Virginia had a three-man race for QB. What's the best way for a coach to handle a quarterback controversy?

I tried not to have any. We had one at Penn State when I was there with three guys, and it was a zoo. My God, it was awful. Sometimes it works out. It worked out for Virginia Tech last year, but they never had a controversy. I tried to pick a starter the first week of the preseason, and if the other guy beat him out, he beat him out. Working with three QBs takes away a lot of reps. It's tough enough to do that with two guys, let alone three.

How would you have handled playing Buckeyes freshman quarterback Terrelle Pryor early this year?

I would try to get him some playing time in the first two games and get his feet wet in those games, just in case you need him against USC on September 13.

How does Noel Devine compare with other West Virginia running backs?

This kid is really special. He's the quickest tailback that West Virginia has ever had. Ever. He's little, and that gives him an advantage. He's hard to get ahold of, and in the open field he's impossible to tackle. He's got great vision, and that's what separates the great backs. They start to blitz you, and you can swing him out in the flat, dump it off to him and he's gone. He's a bona fide 4.3 guy. And not a 4.3 track, he's a 4.3 football.



Noel Devine

HARRELL: DAVID J. PHILLIP / AP; DEVINE: JEFF GENTNER / AP

— Compiled by Derek Samson

'Turnaround King' has a tough job ahead at SMU

By Dave Curtis
dcurtis@sportingnews.com

June Jones gave up the beach-view condominium in paradise and the coach-for-life status he had earned at Hawaii by bringing the program to a BCS bowl. He traded that security for this: 100-degree Dallas days, with freshmen quarterbacks one-hopping and overthrowing passes as they learn his treasured run-and-shoot offense.

Back in January, Jones added another peculiar choice to an already odd career by taking over at SMU, a program with one winning season in the last generation. His new gig almost doubled his salary and placed him at the epicenter of arguably the nation's most fertile recruiting base. Those resources give Jones the ammunition to bring another football team from sorry to successful.

"Of course he's happy," says good friend and former boss Jerry Glanville, now the head coach at Portland State. "He's got something to fix. He would never take the Ohio State job or one of those because they're not broken. He needs something to turn around. He's the turnaround king."

Few coaches have a history of doing more with less than Jones. And maybe no program has less than SMU. Two decades removed from the NCAA "death penalty" that forced the team to disband, it remains lifeless, with no bowl appearances since 1984.

That history makes Jones and the

Mustangs perfect partners. In previous head coaching stops, he took the woeful Atlanta Falcons to the NFL playoffs and lifted moribund Hawaii from Division I-A laughingstock to January's Sugar Bowl. This year's Mustangs, coming off a 1-11 season, started three true freshmen in their opener at Rice, a 56-27 loss.

"I knew the talent level wasn't going to be that good," Jones says. "Otherwise, they wouldn't have been 1-11."

But Jones won his SMU home opener when the Mustangs beat Texas State, 47-36. And he promises the talent will be replenished soon—13 of his 15 recruiting commitments for the class of 2009 come from Texas. Then it will be left to the coach to apply his unorthodox scheme and philosophy once again.

Jones has helped craft the run-and-shoot since he learned it as a quarterback under coach Mouse Davis at Portland State in 1975-76. As a pro, he would attend defensive meetings to better understand how the pass-happy offense could be stopped. Later, his tutoring would turn talented

quarterbacks into temporary superstars—Jeff George with the Falcons, Timmy Chang and Colt Brennan with Hawaii.

Freshman Bo Levi Mitchell is SMU's candidate to join that fraternity. He, like the rest of the Mustangs, have enjoyed Jones' calm, patient approach to leading his team. Jones doesn't wear a whistle at practice, and during a half-hour of watching his offense stumble through drills, he never screams.

"The first day, he told us he was going to treat us like men," senior running back Andrew McKinney says.

"The coaches trust us, and we trust them. Look at where they've been and what they've done."

What they've done has established Jones' legacy as a fortune-changer for football programs. Ragged SMU, though, presents the toughest task yet for the turnaround king.

"I don't know how long it's going to take," Jones says. "But we've done this before. And we can have a winner here."

Jones waved goodbye to Hawaii to coach a team that hasn't been relevant for almost a quarter-century.



3 QUESTIONS WITH ... Penn State coach JOE PATERNO

Q: What did your induction into the College Football Hall of Fame mean?

A: I tell a lot of people if you hang around long enough they have to do something with you. It's a great honor. I look at it as something that's maybe a little bit more for the institution, for the guys at Penn State football. One of these days I'll sit back and think it out a little bit. Right now, it's just a lot of excitement for a lot of people, but I haven't had time to enjoy it.

Q: Do you enjoy a friendly competition with Bobby Bowden in terms of career wins?

A: Bobby's a good friend. Oh, who cares? When they bury me, they're going to put on my gravestone: "You're one win ahead of Bobby Bowden"? No. We've spent a lot of time together through the years, Bobby and his wife, Ann. We've gone on a lot of trips with the Nike coaches. And Terry, and the other brother who coached Auburn for a while. Or was Terry at Auburn? I get them kind of twisted around a little. But they were both—they're good. Hey, Bobby Bowden's a great credit to the game everywhere he's coached. If he comes out with more wins than I do, then we both have it, I'm glad it's him.

Q: How would you assess your quarterback situation this year?

A: Well, we started with three guys, and we think they all can play. Really, there's not much difference between them, and they run our offense well. You can't put in a system for one quarterback because he could go down halfway through the first quarter of the first game. You have to put in something they can all do without much of a strain, and we've got that.

— Dave Curtis

PLAYER TO WATCH

LeSean McCoy, Pitt sophomore running back

The numbers: McCoy set a Big East freshman record with 1,328 rushing yards in 2007. He also eclipsed former Pitt great Tony Dorsett's freshman school records for rushing touchdowns (14) and points (90).

Did you know ... McCoy wears a blue Superman T-shirt under his pads. The "S" is meant to stand for *Shady*, the nickname given to him by his mom when he was an infant because he had "a shady attitude. I was happy and smiling one minute, and the next minute I'd be crying."

What's on tap: The Big East season is looming—the Panthers kick off at Syracuse

on September 27. The last time McCoy faced the Orange, he rushed for 140 yards in a 20-17 victory. The game put him over 1,000 yards for the season.

What they're saying: "Comparisons are just comparisons, and I hate to compare someone to myself ... but this is the first guy that I've seen that reminds me of Tony Dorsett. He is McCoy, the real deal. His potential is unlimited."

— Tony Dorsett, former Pitt running back, 1976 Heisman Trophy winner and member of the Pro Football Hall of Fame

— Derek Samson



JONES: BOB LEVY / GETTY IMAGES; PATERNO: PAUL NISLEY / SI; MCCOY: KEITH SRAMOC / AP

Wrangler

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NHL

Roenicke isn't ready to hang up his skates

By Craig Custance
ccustance@sportingnews.com

First, it was a dive off a 15-foot Arizona cliff into a lake. That wasn't enough, so the next jump came with a flip.

Bored with that challenge during his August vacation, Jeremy Roenicke moved on to a bigger cliff. This time, he climbed 65 feet.

Doug Wilson, if you're reading, feel free to skip this part: "He scales the thing like he's a Navy Seal. He's perched on top, like 60 to 65 feet up, and yells, 'It looks farther down from up here,'" friend Bill Deacon recalls.

Of course, he still jumps. Because when you're Jeremy Roenicke, there's no shimmying back down a cliff.

"He attacks life just like that," Deacon says. "And nobody has fun like J.R."

Roenicke is back for another NHL season. Right now, chasing the Stanley Cup still provides the same thrill as cliff diving.

After a couple of down seasons, Roenicke became a free agent last summer. It appeared he would be forced to retire, but Roenicke got one invitation to keep playing—from Wilson, the Sharks' general manager. Roenicke repaid that faith with surprising success—14 goals, including an incredible 10 game-winners. And who could forget his 2-goal effort against Calgary

in Game 7 of a quarterfinal playoff victory?

This summer was different. Roenicke could have walked away on his own terms. Vindicated.

But at 38, he's back. "I'm going back to win a Cup," he says. "That's the only reason I'm going back to play."

And he's putting everything else on hold to do it.

When asked who would be the perfect candidate to replace him at ESPN, new Lightning coach Barry Melrose didn't hesitate: Roenicke. Melrose sees Roenicke as the future of hockey on television, the man NBC can build its Olympic hockey coverage around in 2010.

Problem is, Roenicke keeps on playing.

But he's not ruling out television. Or radio. Or the movies. There's always golf, too. A scratch golfer, he plans to win the celebrity tournament in Lake Tahoe next year.

And the T-shirt company Roenicke started with Deacon is taking off. Movie quotes on T-shirts. It's blowing up, and yeah, you and your friends should have thought of that idea.

It's Roenicke. He's that good.

"Even when things aren't going your way, he's so much

fun to be around, so positive," says young teammate Torrey Mitchell. "I just remembered him being really fast and being unbelievable when I played (as) him on Nintendo. He lived up to the hype."

When Roenicke finally retires, he'll go down as one of the best American-born hockey players to lace up the skates.

And that moment is probably coming soon.

He started a recent interview by promising this year is it. By the end of the talk, he took it back. The last thing he wants is a going-away tour.

Eventually the lure of everything else will win out over training camps, morning skates and the daily grind that is a hockey season. Especially if San Jose wins the Cup this season.

"I'm tired—physically tired, mentally tired. I think I have enough to get through this year," he says.

But making it official? He's not ready to make that leap.



Intermission Interview with Flyers coach John Stevens



Stevens is confident he's surrounded by a group that can build on last season's success.

SN: Can you carry the momentum from a playoff run like the Flyers had into this season?

STEVENS: The group's success late last year—it gives your team confidence to play at a high level. You can pick up on that.

SN: Have you decided on a captain to replace defenseman Jason Smith?

STEVENS: I'm 95 percent sure we'll have one in place for training camp. I think we have a select few guys who ... obviously, we had a leadership group that remained intact this year. We may add one more guy there, but Smitty moving on is a big loss in our leadership group.

SN: How big is having a healthy Simon Gagne?

STEVENS: I think it's huge. We didn't have him for most of last year. He's feeling great. His conditioning is coming to an elite level. He's a world-class player on both ends of the rink; we're hoping he'll have a huge impact.

—Craig Custance

Roenicke has a thirst for the Cup that will drive him for at least one more season.

Roommate confidential



Colby Armstrong



Sidney Crosby

Thrashers forward Colby Armstrong spent 2½ seasons in Pittsburgh before being traded to Atlanta in February, and during that time he got to know Penguins phenom Sidney Crosby pretty well. Armstrong shares tales from the road, including what it's like to bunk with the brightest star in the game.

Who's the best roommate you've had?

I'd say Crosby. He's pretty focused on hockey. When you're on the road, we got ready for the games the whole time. We like to relax, watch TV and hang out. It's pretty easygoing. He doesn't want to run around town.

What was it like rooming with someone so famous?

Depending on the city we were in, we'd make dinner reservations in the same spot. They knew we were coming every time. We'd let them know Sid was coming to make sure (distractions) are taken care of.

What makes a good roommate?

You have to be on the same page. The one thing with me and Sid, nothing really bothered him. He was a heavy, heavy sleeper. Plus, I snore a little bit. It doesn't bother him.

If Crosby is the best roommate, who's the worst?

My brother (Sharks forward Riley Armstrong). He's just annoying. He doesn't pick up after himself. He's a little too comfortable around me. I haven't beat him up in a few years, so maybe one is on the way.

—Craig Custance

The HOT CORNER

What's your favorite postseason memory from when you were a kid?



Ryan Braun
24-year-old OF, Brewers

Game 1, 1988 World Series: Dodgers vs. A's

"I was really young, but I grew up in Los Angeles, so I remember them replaying the Kirk Gibson home run all the time. It was obviously extremely dramatic, and it doesn't get much better than that—in the World Series in those circumstances."



Brandon Moss
24-year-old OF, Pirates

Game 7, 1992 NLCS: Braves vs. Pirates

"I grew up a Braves fan, so I saw plenty of postseasons. Probably that best moment was Sid Bream's slide and everyone going crazy. 'Braves win! Braves win!' We used to get so caught up in it when I was younger. Every time they'd go to the playoffs, we'd go out in the front yard and pretend we were Braves. I'd pretend I was Sid Bream or Dave Justice or somebody, and my dad would always be Phil Niekro and throw me the knuckleball."



Chris Perez
23-year-old RHP, Cardinals

Game 5, 1995 ALDS: Mariners vs. Yankees

"I remember watching the Mariners and the Yankees in that playoff game, with Ken Griffey Jr. coming around and scoring that run. It was just a big play, a huge play, him flying around third base. It was a great game, and to come down to that play ... it wasn't the World Series, but it was a pretty big game."

— Ryan Fagan

Party in five?

The Hall is on the horizon for the Braves' onetime Big Three

When remembering the Braves' unprecedented run of regular-season dominance (division titles in every full season from 1991 to 2005), talking about only one of their future Hall of Fame pitchers is like trying to outsmart Greg Maddux: virtually impossible. From interviews with the team's manager, then-G.M. and then-pitching coach, *Sporting News* collected some memories that will be rekindled when Maddux, Tom Glavine and John Smoltz go into the Hall of Fame—perhaps in five years, together.

G.M. John Schuerholz on Smoltz

He had the power package that enabled him to separate himself from the other two and become one of the most successful postseason pitchers in history. After the grind of a long season, when even the greatest are worn down, John's warriorlike attitude and power served him well against whatever pitcher he went against.

John was unique in that, because of injuries and surgeries that resulted from injuries, he went from dominant starter to dominant closer and back to dominant starter before his arm gave out this season.

Manager Bobby Cox on Maddux

In spring training, when the minor leaguers were done throwing, they'd come over and watch Mad Dog throw a bullpen. He'd ask them, "You know why I'm making

In their prime, Maddux (front), Glavine and Smoltz were as confident as they were good.



BASEBALL

\$12 million? Any idea at all why I'm successful? It's so (expletive) simple. I know where my fastball is going."

Mad Dog is the only guy who ever went over a game plan with me. Once, I go trotting out in the sixth inning and say, "Is this the guy you said such and such about?" He said, "Yeah. Don't you (expletive) remember? I'm going to pop him up to third, in foul ground, on the second pitch." I go back to the bench and say to Leo (Mazzone), "Listen to this. He's going to pop him up to third in foul territory on the second pitch." Second pitch, boom, right over here in foul territory.

Pitching coach Leo Mazzone on Glavine

I've never seen a stronger-minded individual. I can remember him coming into the dugout in the '95 World Series against Cleveland, scoreless game, fifth inning (Game 6), and he says, "Would somebody score a run? Because they're not going to." We won, 1-0.

He was all fastball and changeup. I remember him pitching a shutout without throwing a single breaking ball. With his arm action, there was no way you could tell if he was throwing a changeup or a fastball. He would make you prove to him that you could hit his fastball down and away. He had that killer instinct without anybody noticing it.

— Stan McNeal

Sporting News asked 25 Hall of Fame voters to rank Maddux, Smoltz and Glavine, based on their Cooperstown worthiness. "I'll vote for all of them, first ballot," says Larry Stone of *The Seattle Times*. The results:

Pitcher	1st place	2nd place	3rd place
Greg Maddux	24	1	0

"May be the greatest pitcher any of us has ever seen."

— Bob Nightengale, *USA Today Sports Weekly*

John Smoltz	1	13	11
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"He gets the ball in the first and ninth if I ever have to win one game."

— Rick Hurd, *Contra Costa Times*

Tom Glavine	0	11	14
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"He's third because one of these three had to be."

— Paul Meyer, *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*

— Jeff D'Alessio

Scouts' Views While Lee got hot, Rios cooled off

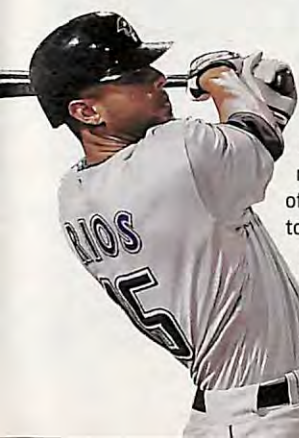
Multi-talented Alex Rios hit a career-high 24 homers for Toronto in 2007, but the outfielder's power has dipped drastically this season. An American League scout says the problem could be in Rios' makeup. "The body and the swing are the same for me," the scout says. "But the pop is not there. The problem, I think, is that he's a 'one-gait' player. He just sort of cruises along, and it looks like he doesn't know how to push himself to go to a higher level. It might be because everything has always been easy for him. Getting that big contract (a multi-year extension in April) probably didn't help much."

But the scout still believes Rios has the ability to be a 30-homer, 30-steal force while playing top-flight defense.

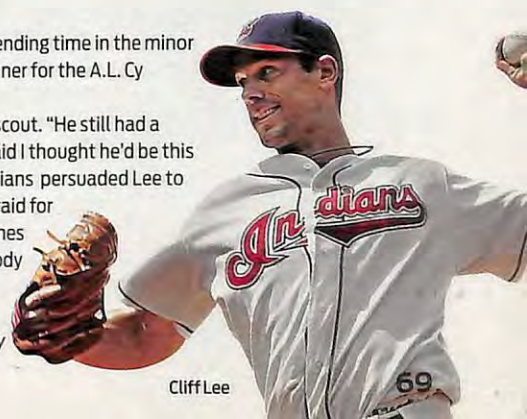
A season after going 5-8 with a 6.29 ERA and spending time in the minor leagues, Indians left-hander Cliff Lee is the front-runner for the A.L. Cy Young award. What triggered the turnaround?

"I had him in as a 'get,'" says a National League scout. "He still had a good arm, and he's lefthanded. But I'd be lying if I said I thought he'd be this good." The difference, the scout says, is that the Indians persuaded Lee to pitch to contact. "He looked last year like he was afraid for anybody to hit the ball. He'd try to make perfect pitches all over the place, and he'd be 3-1 on everybody. Nobody can pitch that way. You have to trust your stuff. He's doing that now."

— Gerry Fraley



Alex Rios



Cliff Lee

Get the checkbooks ready

How's the free-agent class shaping up? The Great Eight of the offseason targets:

1 CC Sabathia, LHP

He'll land the largest contract ever for a pitcher, and the Yankees will lead the pursuit.

2 Mark Teixeira, 1B

Both New York teams will aggressively pursue him; a World Series title could keep Teixeira in Anaheim.



3 Manny Ramirez, OF

Manny loves the attention/sun in Hollywood, but he would make a lot of sense beside Carlos Beltran in the Mets' outfield.

4 Francisco Rodriguez, RHP

K-Rod could end up back with the Angels but not for a hometown discount.

5 Adam Dunn, OF

He strikes out a ton and has a low batting average, but plenty of teams covet his power and high on-base percentage.

6 Raul Ibanez, OF

He has spent his career hidden under Kansas City and Seattle jerseys, but Ibanez is productive and more affordable than Teixeira or Ramirez.

7 Ben Sheets, RHP

Sheets is more likely to stay in Milwaukee than Sabathia, but he won't be cheap, either.

8 A.J. Burnett, RHP

He'll likely opt out to pursue another big deal, but Burnett's career-high win total masks a high ERA and WHIP.

— Ryan Fagan

Somehow, the Braves didn't see Hampton's injury coming.

You don't know [Alex Rodriguez] like I know [Alex Rodriguez]



By Pirates first baseman Doug Mientkiewicz

Even in high school, he always did stuff that you were like, "That's just not normal." He'd walk by the weight room and put five pounds of muscle on while getting ready for baseball practice. He'd grab a basketball and go dunk it, then take a football and throw it 60 yards in the air. It was just not normal. It's not supposed to happen. It's not supposed to be that easy.

He could have done whatever he wanted to do. He could have played in the NFL for a long time as a quarterback. He could have been an NBA point guard. Obviously, you've seen what he's done in baseball. Athletes like him come around once every 50 years.

He was real skinny, and we were throwing footballs to each other at football practice. I was just transferring over (to Miami's Westminster Christian High

School) for my senior year, and they were trying to talk me into playing football. He was quiet, goofy, but a ridiculously stupid athlete.

Ridiculously stupid—that's the best way to put it.

And uncoordinated. He hadn't quite filled into his body yet, and he had his awkward moments like we all did growing up.

Let's put it this way: (Back then), his style wasn't there yet. He'd have some hideous clothes on. He raided my closet all through high school. He's definitely blown by me now.

I have some pictures that I will cherish and probably take to the grave with me of us in suits and tuxedos. They are priceless. I will never let anyone see them but us.

The one thing about him that I've learned and always appreciated is that no one outworks him at anything. He's been that way since he was 16 years old, since I have known him. He outworks every single athlete on earth.

He's always been there for me when I needed him most. The one thing about Alex and all the other guys I played with in high school—we may not speak every day, but when we do get together, we pick up right where we left off. I think that is an attribute of guys who are really close and really good friends. They don't hold grudges. I understand the crazy life Alex is living, but when I see him, we pick up right where we left off.

— As told to Bill Eichenberger



Mientkiewicz (left) and Rodriguez were teammates both last season and in high school.

Extreme makeover: MLB edition

Predictions are like fastballs: You hit some, you miss some. In our preseason playoff predictions, we connected on the Cubs and Angels. We flailed badly, however, on the Tigers, Braves and Indians, who not only will miss the postseason but will be fortunate to finish with winning records. But if those underachievers follow our advice, we might take another swing at them in 2009.

Tigers

What went wrong: The rotation could not overcome a shoddy defense and the loss of Dontrelle Willis' mojo. Gary Sheffield got old and the bullpen did not deliver. The offense hasn't been the wrecking machine many expected, but it still ranks in the top six in runs, average and homers.

Our advice: Go after closer Francisco Rodriguez in free agency. He won't come cheap, but adding Rodriguez would allow Fernando Rodney and Joel Zumaya to remain in setup roles, which is where they work best.

Braves

What went wrong: "We lost four-fifths of our rotation," manager Bobby Cox says. This was no ordinary rotation, either—it included John Smoltz, Tom Glavine, Tim Hudson and Mike Hampton. "Smoltz was throwing the ball better than he ever has before he went out," Cox says.

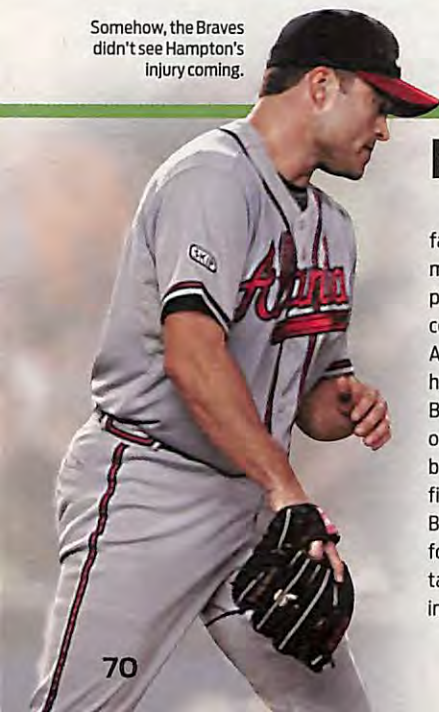
Our advice: Open up the wallet. The Braves dumped Mark Teixeira before the trading deadline, and even though Hampton has a \$6 million buyout, they'll save \$14 million by not picking up his option. That should be enough to buy some offense.

Indians

What went wrong: What was one of the A.L.'s best bullpens a year ago has been the absolute worst in 2008. And getting four home runs—combined—through August from Victor Martinez and Travis Hafner took its toll on the offense.

Our advice: Hafner might never be the same because of a bum shoulder, so the Indians need power-hitting outfield prospect Matt LaPorta to continue his fast track to the majors. Cleveland also must improve its bullpen.

— Stan McNeal



16 years and 6,000 baseballs later, I'm still going—sort of



Todd Jones

Being on the disabled list, I have a lot of free time—something I can't remember having in September in a long time.

During your career, you just go and go and go. You don't look up. You don't care what city you're in. All you really know is what day it is and whether you have a night game or a day game. You learn to take care of today and not to worry about tomorrow until today's game is over.

Days turn into weeks, weeks into months. Years turn into a (hopefully long) career. Then you're finished.

My future remains uncertain because of my shoulder injury, but this time on the D.L. has given me a chance to reflect on all the years, all the trips, all the teams. When you see the numbers below, don't get out your calculator to double-check them. They're estimates to give you an idea of what it's like to play in the majors for 16 years.

I've played all over this country, for (in order) the Astros, Tigers, Twins, Rockies, Red Sox, Reds, Phillies, Marlins and Tigers again. For the most part, I've been centrally located, which cuts down on travel. In a typical year, we go on about 13 road trips, usually visiting two cities each trip, though sometimes it's three.

I'm old enough to have played when there were just two divisions in each league. That travel was the best. When I was in Houston, we made two West Coast trips a season, one in each half. Usually, we started at one end of the state and traveled to the other. We didn't, for example, begin a trip in Los Angeles, go to San Diego and then go to San Francisco. After a couple of days, your body clock adjusted. Three divisions in each league makes travel more complicated.

Now there are more scattered trips. One year, we went to Seattle, Texas and Boston on the same trip.

At nearly every stop, I've left tickets, probably nearly 10,000, for family, friends, acquaintances and even waiters and bellmen who helped us out. Until five years ago, we didn't have to pay for them. Once we did, comp tickets went down across the league.

As for equipment, I'm guessing over the years I've gone through about three hats a year, 60 total pairs of spikes (courtesy of Nike), 30 pairs of Oakleys, 70 gloves—about half of which I've given away (thanks, Easton)—and countless pairs of batting gloves. I don't hit very often, but it gets cold in Detroit.

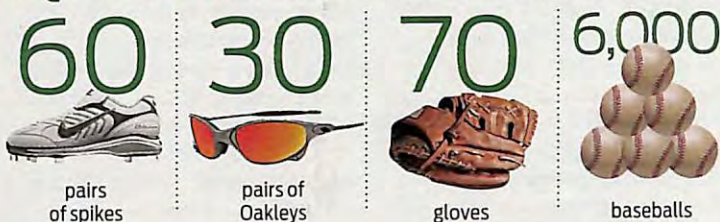
How many baseballs have I given away during batting practice over the years? At least three a day. Figuring we have about 140 BPs a season, we're talking more than 6,000 baseballs during my career. Wow. All I wanted when I went to the park as a kid was to get a ball. I think I've done my part to give back.

Tigers relief pitcher Todd Jones is a regular contributor to Sporting News.



EQUIPMENT

I'm guessing over the years I've gone through:



Fatal flaws

With the playoffs approaching, five teams eyeing October success have major concerns:

1 Mets' bullpen. If Billy Wagner is healthy, the 'pen is solid. Without the hard-throwing lefty, though, the late innings can get messy. Aaron Heilman quickly pitched his way out of the ninth-inning role, leaving it to Luis Ayala, plucked from the Nationals' scrapheap.

2 Diamondbacks' strikeouts. Four regulars—Mark Reynolds, Chris Young, Adam Dunn and Justin Upton—have more strikeouts than games played this season. That's a weakness easily exposed by top-caliber pitchers in the postseason.

3 White Sox's defense. They have more errors than any other playoff contender. Joe Crede (20 errors) might be lost for the season, meaning Juan Uribe (a middle infielder) will have to continue to fill in at the hot corner.

4 Dodgers' closer. Jonathan Broxton, the primary closer with Takashi Saito (elbow) sidelined, has been largely hit-or-miss. An eight-appearance stretch in August featured three saves, a win, two blown saves, three losses and a 7.88 ERA.

5 Rays' offense. It's uncertain whether Carl Crawford will return from finger surgery, and the Rays will need Evan Longoria (wrist) at full strength. Tampa Bay weathered those injuries in August, but runs are at a premium in the postseason.

—Ryan Fagan

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NASCAR



Jimmie Johnson

Is Yarborough about to have company?

If Jimmie Johnson wins the Cup title this season, he'll match Cale Yarborough's record of three straight championships at NASCAR's highest level (1976-1978). To find out just how tough winning three in a row is, *Sporting News* went to Yarborough, the man who'd know best.

"You always want to keep a record, but he certainly has a shot at it—and if he ties my record, that'll be fine with me. He's a good driver and a good fellow, and I'd be honored to have him hold that record with me.

"I know (winning three in a row) was hard. Why nobody else has done it, I have no idea. It almost seems impossible, really, with the caliber of drivers that have come along since

He's a good driver and a good fellow, and I'd be honored to have him hold that record with me.

then, that somebody hasn't done it.

"They were all hard to win. I was driving for Junior (Johnson), and he had a good team, and if I had stayed with Junior—instead of making the decision to cut back and spend more time with the family and not run all the races anymore—we might have won more.

"Jimmie's a great racecar driver, and one reason I wouldn't be disappointed is that he says that I was his hero when he was growing up. So, if that's the case, he'd be welcome to join me."

— As told to Reid Spencer

2008 Chase preview

Catch them if you can ...

We're pretty sure this thing is going to come down to Kyle Busch and Carl Edwards, but in the final 10 races, anything can happen

By Reid Spencer

The field is set, and the Chase for the NASCAR Sprint Cup is about to begin. In 10 races, we'll know whether Jimmie Johnson, Jeff Gordon, Tony Stewart or Matt Kenseth was able to add to his legacy or whether the 2008 season brought a first title to one of eight drivers vying for a breakthrough championship. Between now and then, what should you look for? A few key ingredients in this year's Chase:

Crew chiefs with a lot to prove

► **Steve Letarte** and Jeff Gordon had an average finish of 5.1 and ended up second in last year's Chase—but that was last year. This season, Letarte has taken flak because Gordon's equipment hasn't lived up to expectations.

► During the races, **Tony Eury** and Dale Earnhardt Jr. sound like bickering spouses in a bad marriage, but away from the heat of battle, Junior staunchly defends his cousin. Nonetheless, the duo's move from Dale Earnhardt Inc. to Hendrick Motorsports hasn't produced enough success to satisfy Junior Nation.

► If owner Richard Childress does what he has threatened to do, **Gil Martin** will stay with the No. 07 car and new RCR driver Casey Mears next year when Clint Bowyer shifts to the No. 33. If Martin and Bowyer mount a strong run in the Chase, though, Childress might be forced to reconsider.

If momentum matters ...

► **Kyle Busch** and **Carl Edwards** will battle for the championship. The top drivers entering the Chase are most likely to win it, thanks to an edge in bonus points for wins—witness last year's two-way battle between Jimmie Johnson and Jeff Gordon, who entered the Chase as the top two seeds.

► **Johnson** will make a strong bid for a third straight title. The No. 48 Chevrolet showed remarkable speed in winning the last two regular-season races, and Johnson has owned the final six weeks of the Chase schedule—he won four of the final five races last year and posted a win and four seconds in the final six events a year earlier.

► **Tony Stewart** won't continue his every-third-year championship pattern. Committed to a move to Stewart-Haas Racing as an owner-driver next season, the 2002 and 2005 Cup winner has had more on his mind this season than driving the No. 20 Toyota, and those issues have kept him from mounting his typical second half charge.

Don't be surprised if...

► **Denny Hamlin** is a factor in the Chase. As a rookie in 2006, Hamlin finished third in the final standings; this year, Hamlin, crew chief Mike Ford and the No. 11 crew have picked up their performances in the closing stages of NASCAR's regular season.

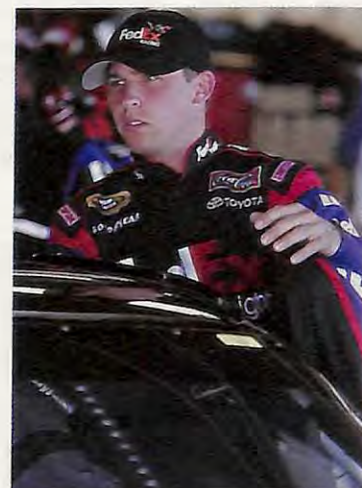
► **Greg Biffle** wins two Chase races. Three of Biffle's last four Cup victories have come in Chase events, and he won at Homestead from 2004 through 2006.

► **There are more than two drivers with a mathematical chance to win the championship at Homestead.** The expansion of the Chase from 10 drivers to 12 last year enhances the prospects of a free-for-all in the finale.

► **Kevin Harvick** makes a late surge. In 2006, victories at the Chase's two 1-mile flat tracks—New Hampshire and Phoenix—propelled Harvick to a fourth-place finish in the standings, 78 points behind Jimmie Johnson.

New faces, new places

► **Steve Addington.** A laid-back



Hamlin and his team have been getting stronger as the season has gone on.

crew chief, Addington has been one of the key components in Kyle Busch's remarkable transition from Hendrick Motorsports to Joe Gibbs Racing. He's making his first Chase appearance.

► **Dale Earnhardt Jr.** Almost everything about Junior is different this year. The move to Hendrick Motorsports brought a new car number, new sponsors, a trip to victory lane and a ticket to the Chase, which Earnhardt missed last year.

► **Chip Bolin.** How do you follow Robbie Reiser's act as Matt Kenseth's crew chief? By getting to the Chase for the first time—keeping Kenseth's record of perfect attendance in the Chase intact. Only Kenseth and Jimmie Johnson have qualified for all five Chases.

► **Scott Miller.** OK, he's not exactly a new face among crew chiefs—he has helped Jeff Burton to the Chase the past two seasons—but he maintains such a low profile that even Burton might have trouble picking him out of a lineup. Burton's cars have been consistently good this year, but they haven't had the speed necessary to challenge the top three seeds in the Chase.

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Crystal ball

We asked a few NASCAR know-it-alls how they think the Chase will play out:

► Larry McReynolds

Dale Earnhardt's former crew chief, FOX analyst

"I believe we will be crowning Kyle Busch's No. 18 team as our 2008 champion. They really have no weak tracks, and they won at three of the 10 Chase tracks in the first half of the season. I feel it probably will not come down to who outperforms as much as who dodges bad luck."



► Kyle Petty

Petty Enterprises driver

"After Bristol, I thought that it was going to be a two-man race between Kyle (Busch) and Carl (Edwards). But Jimmie Johnson's total domination at California should have put some fear into everyone because downforce tracks make up over half of the Chase schedule."



► Rusty Wallace

1989 Cup champ, ESPN analyst

"Jimmie Johnson will win the Chase. He's a two-time champion, and he always seems, for whatever reason, to be a second half driver and gaining momentum as the year goes on. After how dominant he was at Indianapolis and California, I really think he's the favorite to win the championship for a third time."



► Wally Dallenbach

Former driver, TNT analyst

"It's going to come down to Kyle Busch and Jimmie Johnson. (Johnson's) 48 team rises to the occasion this time of year, and there are a lot of strong tracks for Jimmie in the last 10. Kyle has been on fire, and unless they beat themselves will be hard to beat for the championship. I know how bad Kyle will want to beat the Hendrick team if it comes down to it for the championship, and motivation is a very strong asset."



1-on-1 with Jeff Gordon

Jeff Gordon had a remarkable season in 2007—six victories and a second-place finish in the Chase for the NASCAR Sprint Cup. Despite his 81 career wins and four titles, Gordon has never won a championship under the Chase format, which was implemented in 2004. In 2008, he is winless through 26 races, though he has qualified for the Chase. Gordon, 37, sat down recently with *Sporting News'* Reid Spencer to talk about his career.

SN: You always seem a lot more focused on the next race you have to run, rather than on career milestones. Is there anything you look at and say, "I'd like to be there" or "I'd like to do that?"

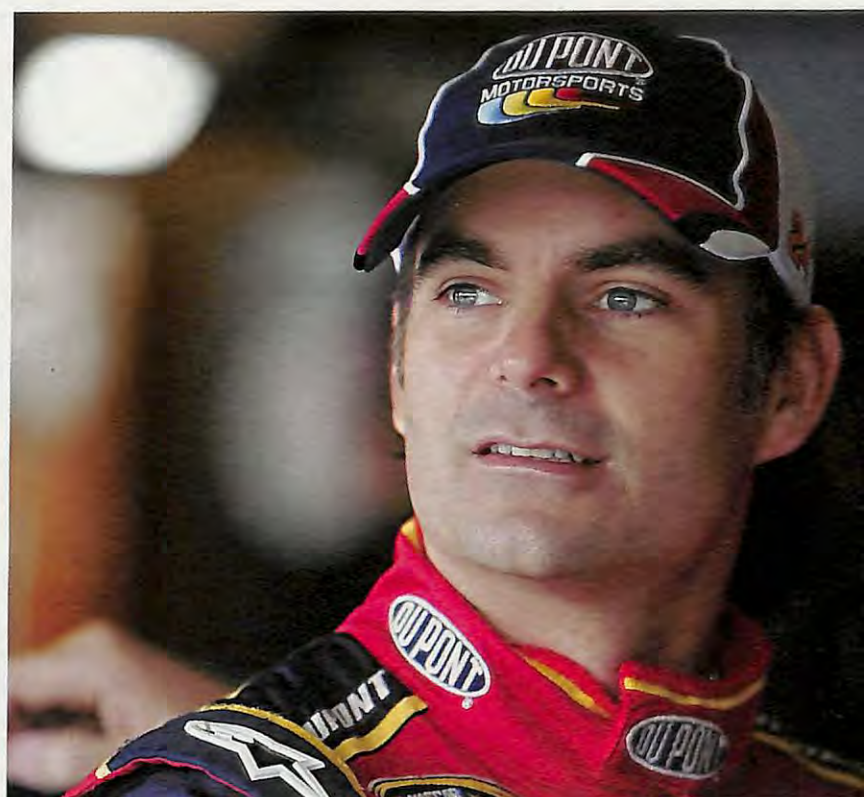
GORDON: It's not that (milestones) are not important to me. They're very important to me. But I'm not going to be able to focus and enjoy them right now. I think one day down the road, when I can look back on my career, I'm going to look back on different milestones and say, "That was really significant. That was impressive."

SN: How about 85 wins? That would move you past Cale Yarborough, Darrell Waltrip and Bobby Allison and put you third on the all-time victory list.

GORDON: How about 82? I'm looking for 82. You have a season like you had last year, and you say, "Aw, shoot, that's nothing. We'll take care of that next year." You just never know. I'll never forget Mark Martin, always saying, when he'd go to victory lane, "You know, I just love these wins so much because I just never know when the next one's going to be coming." It's so true. You don't. It's very competitive. The cars change, things change.

If you'd talked to me last year, I'd say, "Yeah, I'm looking forward to catching those guys or passing those guys." This year, I'm going, "Hey, I'd just like to get another win." I think that with the Chase now, championships are totally different. If you had asked me prior to the Chase if I thought I could get six or seven championships, I felt like six was doable, and we've kind of proven that with our points.

They just didn't count because they weren't the Chase format. I feel like my style of driving, and as good as we are at so many different tracks, that the old format suited me much better than the new format—even though I support the Chase. I think it's fantastic, and I



More than anything, Gordon wants to prove he can win a title under the Chase format.

want to win one really badly. I think that's probably the No. 1 thing on my mind is to win a championship under the Chase format.

SN: Tony Stewart and Ryan Newman will be the two drivers next year at Stewart-Haas Racing. With Stewart-Haas being a Hendrick customer for engines, chassis and technical expertise, how do you and the other Hendrick drivers view them from a competitive standpoint?

GORDON: Under the right circumstances, it can be a great relationship because we can get more from them, they can utilize our resources better, and they can continue to stay a great customer. When they start being competitive with us, that's when we have to think about where they stand.

SN: If they start winning too many races?

GORDON: They can win races—as long as we're not finishing second to 'em. Then we've got to renegotiate.

SN: If you had to sum it up in a sentence or two, what would you like your legacy in the sport to be?

GORDON: To me, the most impressive thing is when (drivers) say, "Man, that guy could drive a racecar. He did special things in a racecar." That's all. I've just put so many years into it, and it's really my peers more than anything else. ... As a person outside the sport, I want to be recognized as a person who treats people good, wants to help others, good husband, good father. But in the sport, I want to be recognized as a great racecar driver.

JIM BEAM *Racing*



**"I TAKE PLENTY OF
RISKS FROM BEHIND THE WHEEL.
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SCENE

The GARAGE

A little fight never hurt anyone—especially during the Chase

Kyle Busch and Carl Edwards have been warned: Pull another stunt like they did at Bristol and there could be a penalty.

Not to mention a TV ratings bonanza in the Chase for the NASCAR Sprint Cup.

"I guarantee you (NASCAR was) sitting there whenever they had to make that call saying, 'Man I wish we didn't have to do this,'" says Jeff Gordon, a four-time Cup champ. "The last thing you want is those guys to calm down.

"That was a heck of a show (at Bristol), some of the most exciting racing and action and controversy that we've had in this sport in a while."

For that reason—and the fact they sit 1-2 in the points standings—all eyes will be on Busch and Edwards in the Chase. The two enter the Chase serving a six-week NASCAR-sanctioned probation handed down after their August 23 postrace confrontation.

Some in the garage wondered whether the relatively light penalty—they weren't fined or docked points—is a sign NASCAR is willing to tolerate such outbursts to generate excitement during the Chase.

"This is NASCAR saying, 'Look, you've got to take it easy,'" Edwards

says. "That's the way I take it, like, 'Don't go out there and do something really stupid.'

"As a driver, you should never let your emotions get you. You should never go out and do something stupid, but we do—all of us do."

Edwards doesn't think probation will change how the rivals race each other.

"It will be the crew chief in my ear (and team owner) Jack (Roush) making sure that we don't go out there and do something dumb, and that's what probation does—just makes you take a minute before you do something," Edwards says. "The racing will be the same, but the stuff afterward might be a little more subdued."

► When Tony Stewart parts ways with Joe Gibbs Racing after the Chase, he'll leave behind Greg Zipadelli, the only crew chief he has regularly worked with in his 10-year Cup career.

Stewart announced his new Stewart-Haas Racing team will be run by Hendrick Motorsports engineer Darian Grubb.

At 32, Grubb already has quite a resume:

■ He moved from his role as an engineer to work as interim crew chief for Jimmie Johnson in 2006



Putting Busch (front) and Edwards on probation was a not so stern warning to stop them from doing "something really stupid" that fans just might love.

while Chad Knaus served a four-race suspension. During that time, Grubb helped lead Johnson to two wins, including one in the Daytona 500.

■ He won the Coca-Cola 600 in 2007, when he served as crew chief for Casey Mears and the No. 25 Hendrick Chevrolet.

Landing Grubb could help solidify Stewart-Haas' affiliation with Hendrick, which will continue to supply the team with engines and technical assistance.

Stewart says it was important to find someone who could work well not only with him but with Hendrick officials.

"It's very hard ... to find that chemistry and the right people that are going to be right for your operation, what your goals are, what your expectations are," Stewart says. "Knowing how closely we are

going to be working with the Hendrick organization, it has to be somebody that the Hendrick organization feels comfortable with that we can bring in to work with their people, too.

"There's a lot (more to it) other than just saying, 'I like this guy.' It's not nearly that easy."

► Busch and Johnson are co-favorites to win the Chase, according to the staff of *NASCAR Scene*.

Eleven staff members picked a champion in the publication's annual Chase magazine. Busch and Johnson received four votes each, Edwards two votes and Gordon one.

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PIT BOX

Would you give the Chase a chance?

NASCAR greets Darrell Waltrip and Cale Yarborough have a lot in common. Waltrip has 84 career Cup wins, Yarborough 83. Each won three points titles. Each finished second three times. And each dominated decades before the Chase for the NASCAR Sprint Cup was established to determine the champion. To Chase or not to Chase, that is the question.

Q: Let's play fill in the blank with this statement: "If the Chase had been around when I was a driver ..."



Cale Yarborough



Darrell Waltrip

YARBOROUGH: "I probably would have won every one of 'em. I think the Chase would have suited my style. It's kind of a playoff, and everybody gets ready for a playoff. I'm sure I would have given it my best shot."

WALTRIP: "I probably wouldn't have liked it then, no more than I like it now. As an old-school driver and a former champion, I think you should be a 36-race champion and not a 10-race champion. That's been a struggle I've had with the Chase all along."

—Reid Spencer



Joe Namath

Sporting News AFL player of the year, 1968

Joe Namath's latest guarantee: Brett Favre will need a lot of help from his new teammates if the Jets are to win their first championship since Broadway Joe & Co. stunned the Baltimore Colts in Super Bowl 3. "Brett's a Hall of Fame quarterback, but it's gonna be tough," says Namath, now 65 and living in Florida with his five dogs. With the 40th anniversary of Namath's Super season upon us, he took a quick trip down memory lane with *Sporting News*.

"I saw an interview a while back with Don Larsen. They were talking to him about his perfect game. The guy said, 'Don, do you ever get tired of talking about the perfect game?' Don said, 'Why would I?' I loved that answer. Any time anyone asks me about Super Bowl 3—at an airport, at the convenience store—I love talking about it. It comes up every day. The fans won't let it go.

"I was like a 2-month-old puppy dog back then. You know what a puppy's like: They don't know what's going on, so they want to get into everything. I messed up a few times (off the field), but my teammates knew I was always ready to work. Football was the main focus of my life. I didn't leave it at the stadium; I ate, slept and drank it, with a little social activity mixed in. After my career, I was reminded time and again how fortunate I was not to start a family until later. I could totally focus on the game.

"I'll always remember two games from that (1968) season. I played like a mutt. We lost at Buffalo (37-35 in Week 3). I threw five interceptions, and three were returned for touchdowns. How often does that happen? Two weeks later, we played Denver at Shea and I did it again—five interceptions (in a 21-13 loss). I fooled myself into thinking I was ready, and I wasn't. I didn't use the team the way I should have. I learned a big-time lesson and learned to count on my defense. I did that the rest of the season—even in the Super Bowl, when we didn't throw a pass in the fourth quarter. Didn't have to.

"There was no plan to the guarantee. Before the Super Bowl, a big, heavy Colts fan in the back of the room said, 'Hey Namath, we're gonna kick your (expletive),' and I said it. 'We're gonna win the game. I guarantee it.' Having played for great high



To this day, talking about his Super Bowl 3 guarantee brings a smile to Namath's face.

school, college and pro coaches, I was taught not to be overconfident, but that's the way I felt. I was trained for that game since I was a young boy. My basic goals were always: 1. Earn a spot on the team; 2. Show them you're the man; and 3. Win a championship.

"My teammates were a little p.o.'d with me (after the guarantee). Dave Herman, our guard, was playing with me a little but said, 'Why you getting 'em mad, you jerk? Now they're going to want to kill us.' The next day, we're standing at midfield and Coach (Weeb) Ewbank says, 'Gosh darnit, Joe, look at how confident those guys are.' I said, 'Hey, Coach, it's your fault. You're the one who made us believe we were going to win the game.'

"To this day, that game remains a great example of how you can get something accomplished when most of the experts don't think you can. And it really changed my life. Ever since, folks say hello to me more often. Ninety percent of them have a smile on their face when they're talking about Super Bowl 3. The other 10 percent are Baltimore fans."

— As told to Jeff D'Alessio

There's no excusing the BCS

By John Feinstein

The month of September is one most fans eagerly look forward to: Baseball's dog days are over and pennant races ramp up. The NFL stops playing games that mean nothing but knock out key players for the season. The weather—in most places—begins to cool.

And college football begins in earnest.

All of which is good, except for one thing: College football is the only sport on earth that does not crown a true champion. Oh sure, LSU was given a trophy last year for beating Ohio State. All of which proved without doubt that LSU was ... well, better than Ohio State.

LSU may have been better than Georgia. It also might have been better than USC. Or, it might not have been. Sadly, we will never know. The reason: the Bowl Championship Series.

There has never been a pox on sports like the BCS. The essence of sports is competition. The essence of the BCS is politics and greed. It exists because of the greed of BCS school presidents and because of the sycophants who surround them and continue to prop it up—conference commissioners, athletic directors, TV networks and boorish bowl directors—who keep insisting there are reasons for the BCS to continue to exist.

Let's review the worn-out excuses they trot out each year:

The BCS makes the regular season more meaningful.

Wrong. Is college basketball's regular season lacking in meaning? Is the outcome of every single game during the last month of the regular season not dissected in a thousand ways by bracketologists? Teams are on the bubble and off the bubble. Teams have

played their way into a No. 1 seed or out of a No. 2. The minute the brackets go up on the national holiday that is now Selection Sunday, people are howling.

You want a meaningful regular season? Here's how you do it: a 12-team tournament with the top four teams getting byes. The next four teams host first-round games. How important do you think home field would be? And the last four teams are on the bubble, just trying to avoid a trip to the International Bowl. Would people be screaming when the bracket went up? You bet.

A football tournament would endanger the "tradition of the bowls."

Oh, please. First, the tradition of the bowls died long ago. Bowls—and their corporate names—come and go these days like hot boy bands. The only bowl with any tradition left is the Rose because it doesn't get slapped with a new corporate name every 15 minutes.

What's more, a tournament would enhance the bowls. The so-called major bowls have lost a lot of luster since the BCS began because the only game most people focus on is the championship. If, for argument's sake, seven bowls rotated as tournament hosts from the quarterfinals on, each would have meaning. You could start the first year with quarterfinals at the Cotton, Gator, Fiesta and Citrus bowls. The semis would be at the Sugar and Orange, the championship at the Rose. You could rotate after that. The quarterfinals would be played on January 1, the semis a week later and the championship the weekend in between the NFL conference finals and the Super Bowl.

The second-tier bowls would remain the same, with all played pre-January 1 to give every 6-6 team and deserving nonpower schools (Navy and Air Force come to mind) a place to play.

A tournament would put too much pressure on the "student-athletes."

This is the whopper of all myths. Division I-A football players graduate at an alarmingly low rate. Let's be honest: Almost no one fielding a major team cares if the players graduate, as



Acclaimed author John Feinstein is a regular contributor to *Sporting News*. Feinstein has written 23 books, including No. 1 best-sellers *A Season on the Brink* and *A Good Walk Spoiled*.

long as they win. The BCS school that traditionally graduates the most players is Duke, a laughingstock for the simple reason that it rarely wins any games.

The worst thing about the BCS is this: It isn't fair to the players, whose teams' fate is placed in the hands of computers. It is especially unfair for an undefeated team to be told it cannot compete for a championship. When Boise State beat Oklahoma in the Fiesta Bowl, it should have kept playing. You're supposed to play until they give you a trophy or until you lose.

The best story in college sports in the last 20 years was George Mason's run to the 2006 Final Four. The Patriots beat North Carolina in the second round, Connecticut in the regional final. In football, Little Teams That Can never get a chance to play those games, much less win them.

"I've always wondered what it would be like to have to tell a group of players, 'Yes you won, but you don't get to play anymore because the rules say you can't,'" says Alan Merten, president of George Mason. "I'm very glad we don't ever have to do that in basketball."

Or in any other sport at any level. Every other level of college football has a tournament. Every other NCAA sport has a tournament.

The BCS is like the emperor's new clothes. Everyone oohed and aahed at the new clothes until one little boy who wasn't afraid of the truth shouted out, "But he has no clothes on!"

College football needs someone to play the role of the little boy. Not down the road.

Now.

Feinstein's playoff proposal (Year 1)



College football "champions" such as LSU should get the opportunity to celebrate something a little more significant than the moderately heady feeling of being better than Ohio State.

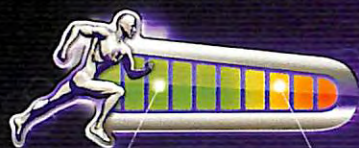
SPORTING NEWS (ISSN 0038-805X) September 15, 2008, Vol. 232, No. 36 is published biweekly, except for one week in June and July, semiweekly for one week in April and September and two weeks in August by SPORTING NEWS, a division of American City Business Journals, Inc., 120 W. Morehead St., Ste. 200, Charlotte, NC 28202-1831. Periodicals postage paid at Charlotte, NC and additional mailing offices. For subscription service write to SPORTING NEWS, P.O. Box 51573, Boulder, CO 80322-1573. Subscription price is \$78.00 for 28 issues. Subscribers in Canada add \$35.00 per 28 issues. Air Mail rates available on request. Allow six weeks for change of address. Postmaster: Send address changes to SPORTING NEWS, P.O. Box 51573, Boulder, CO 80322-1573. Occasionally, we make our subscriber list available to carefully screened companies that offer products and services we believe would interest our readers. If you do not want to receive these offers and/or information, please advise us at P.O. Box 51573, Boulder, CO 80322-1573. SPORTING NEWS assumes no responsibility for the return of unsolicited manuscripts, color negatives or transparencies. COPYRIGHT © 2008 American City Business Journals, Inc. PRINTED IN U.S.A. CANADA GST REGISTRATION NUMBER R-124853730. Publications Mail Agreement Number 40612608. Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to: BleuChip International, P.O. Box 25542, London, ON N6C 6B2. SPORTING NEWS is a federally registered trademark of American City Business Journals, Inc. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. REPRODUCTION IN WHOLE OR IN PART, WITHOUT PERMISSION IS PROHIBITED.

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